

This Love is An Asylum

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This Love is An Asylum

by [amoralagent](#)

Summary

"Should you open the door, or should I?"

"I don't think they'll knock."

Silence of the Lambs AU! No one expects to look beyond the glass wall of Hannibal Lecter's prison cell, and see two faces staring back.

Notes

SOTL AU. Yes, they're both captured (or, recaptured in Hannibal's case). Yes, they will be in that glass cell together. And no, Frederick Chilton is Not Happy About It.

Also, it'll be kind of a narrow focus of what happens in regards to Will and Hannibal, and what occurs in the BSHCI. So, our boy Billy won't be making a proper appearance, and we won't follow Clarice outside the hospital, but she'll be just fine. I don't actually know how many chapters this will contain, but we'll find out as we go along. Enjoy!

Chapter 1

We die to each other daily. What we know of other people is only our memory of the moments during which we knew them. And they have changed since then.

-T.S. Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*

It was so early the sun had only just began to rise, the papery light from outside slinking into the room. Birds tittering. There was a draft from somewhere- probably a downstairs window left ajar and the breeze running up the stairs to greet them- and Will turned over closer to Hannibal, and covered his leg back up. He settled his face against his shoulder, his skin like a heater in the chill of the room: "Is it today?"

"Good morning." Hannibal's voice was more awake than he'd expected it to be, and a hand found it's way into his hair, not exactly discouraging his want to go back to sleep, "It's been nineteen hours. You know what they say about the first forty-eight hours of an investigation."

"They're getting slow. Well, *slower*. Disappointing, really."

"They don't have their best assets." Hannibal smiled, letting him untangle himself from the sheets and watching him stretch up like a cat, "It would be a surprise if they show up before noon."

Will shot him an exasperated look, pulling on a shirt, "We didn't exactly make it difficult."

"It isn't our usual style to leave a note. They could've thought it was a copycat."

"It was a fucking *massacre*. The note was written on an actual *wall*."

"They'd have to be sure, Will." Hannibal didn't shrug, but it felt like he might. Will sighed.

"God. They fell apart without me." He quipped, swiping up his boxers and pulling them on. Hannibal just eyed him. Then, they both looked towards the window, listening. Will cocked a brow, "That's the gravel of the driveway."

"Indeed it is." Hannibal conceded, making no move to get up.

"Should you open the door, or should I?"

"I don't think they'll knock."

Will picked up Hannibal's discarded shirt, and threw it at his face, "Better get up, then."

He clicked open and flicked shut the folding knife on his way down the stairs. Hannibal had disappeared off to the front of the house, undoubtedly to greet their guests when they

abruptly arrived. Or rather, let themselves in; the crack of the doorframe hadn't yet happened.

He'd be unwelcoming, and come from the shadows. Will was to wait in the lounge to cover the back door.

He knew they'd breach all the exits they could, vests on, guns raised- maybe even try to kill-on-sight. What he didn't know, is that they'd already have guests in the lounge. *Still.*

Hannibal had neglected to get rid of the bodies from the night before. Granted, he'd cleaned up the blood. They were beginning to smell though, both sat on the couch in their own house, authoritatively. Necks split in half like butterflied chicken thighs.

Will looked at them once and turned his back. His brain fizzed at how early in the day it was to see and smell corpses. Let alone make them.

The glint of the knife in his hand felt better suited to Hannibal's throat in that moment, but he didn't have the time to consider his anger. He doubted they'd be able to argue about it later. A curt yell from one side of the house, and both doors were battered in, four agents each side, armed to the teeth.

Only four. *They'd be coming in waves.*

They threw smoke grenades, a pop and a hiss, the air misted thickly. Their bulky black shapes began treading through. Only helmet torches cut into the fog.

Will stayed still behind the bookcase. Waiting for the team to split up, and one to come his way.

Whenever he killed, Hannibal moved in a dance; somehow graceful in his violence. Will had seen it before, but regretted not being able to watch it. He could imagine it, and did, when he cracked one of the agents head into a mirror, briskly wrapping an arm across his chin and slitting his throat. A spray of bullets curved up to the ceiling as he fell, knocking over a lamp that shattered next to him. Blood marbling the floor. Glass like glinting jewels all around him. Will slipped into the next room as both warning shouts and shots came in his direction.

Hannibal was probably being more precise somehow, at his end of the building, the wounds deeper and cleaner, movements quicker.

Or maybe he was being over the top, and disembowelling them.

Another light from one of the agents flicked over, approaching through the doorway, followed by the tread of footsteps. He was shot at before he knocked the gun away.

There were snipers. Typical. Hannibal spotted one from the soft reflection in the cracked glass of a painting. Perched on top of the church next door. There was no time for any glimmer of admiration, and he moved away from the window.

He'd made quick work of the first few they'd sent in. But as he held one of them and stuck his knife between his collarbones, another shot at his head. Instead of hitting Hannibal, in the

haze and confusion, he killed his friend. As he did so, a stray bullet grazed Hannibal's lower arm, but he gutted him before he could reload a clip.

He had time to pour some whiskey on the wound- an aged bottle they had wanted to save for a special occasion. Lip curling, he supposed this occasion was definitely special enough. A piece of tied shirt stopped the bleeding.

He needed to be more careful. Patient.

He swallowed down some blood in his mouth, unsure if it was his own or not- probably not- and stepped over a body. A demanding shout echoed from down the hall, and he darted off. After all, they can't hit a target they can't see.

Unless they were very lucky.

Will got on top of the last one, stuck his fingers into the stab wound he'd managed before his knife was knocked from his grasp. Hands reached up for his face and eyes, legs kicking out like a colt, but the blood came faster, and Will bared his weight down until his windpipe crunched under his palms. A few wet gasps and wheezes, and that was it.

The smoke had swam up to the ceiling. The room was left in a blurry ether, smelling of decay and iron. He picked up his knife, and wiped his eye of arterial spray.

There was only a moment to breathe, before they sent in more troops.

Once the fog had fully cleared, and his hands were too slick to properly grip anything, Will held them up. And suddenly, it was silent.

The knife clattered back down to the floor. Blood dripped from his fingertips. It ran rivulets down his arms.

He stood in the middle of the room, surrounded; a twitchy finger being the only thing between him, and joining the bodies already cooling beneath them. He carefully knelt down into the warm blood on the floor. Folded his hands behind his head. Boldly, one of the agents approached him with a pistol pointed in his face. Will ignored the barrel, and looked him straight in the eye.

Jack's stare didn't waver.

A detached sadness bloomed behind his eyes like a black rose. Will was covered in blood, the same as he was in front of the Hobbs residence- a lifetime away now- but the look in his eyes was different. Present. Smiling. He wasn't the same man at all.

"I don't mean to shatter your ego, Jack. But this isn't the first time I've had a gun pointed at me."

And he didn't need saving.

Pointedly, Jack clicked the safety off. Will's face didn't change as he stepped forward, "It could be the last."

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Is the nightmare black or are the windows painted?

-Elton John, *Madman Across the Water*

They're both locked in cages, and transported away. The aftermath of their capture falls on Jack's head. Freddie Lounds wants an interview with Will, and knows far more than she should.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The blood dried in the creases of his palms, cakey, imbedded under his nails, and sticking in the hair of his arms. It got itchy where the handcuffs held his wrists, the chains that secured them to the belt rattling and swaying in time with the traffic. The guards either side of the van still held their guns in their laps. He watched their hands through the cage grate, how when the van jostled, their grip tightened.

The one next to the box they'd put him in didn't look at him once, just sat there, holding his gun, sweating under his uniform. But the one sat opposite, off to the left, didn't take his eyes off of Will. He could feel the flat, fixed glare on his face and neck. When he finally met it, expecting some noble, newly-warmed anger, he was met with a type of... *curiosity*. Like he was looking straight at a tiger with a muzzle on.

He just stared straight back. The van went over a pothole, and they all quaked with it. Their gaze snagged, and neither backed down, and Will was pretty sure he wasn't blinking; as if the back of an armoured SUV wasn't stuffy enough. Maybe he didn't think Will was lucid. Or he pitied him. He considered asking him if there was something on his face, but the non-rhetorical answer would've been *yes*. And he couldn't blame him for staring. After all, he was seeing a legally-documented ghost.

Just as he thought the man might just pee his pants, or give up and opt for stonewalling him, he smiled. A sniff of a laugh, one-sided, an act of vanity. It was short-lived; perhaps he'd made himself laugh at the absurdity of what he had witnessed. At the reality of *who* he was having a staring contest with.

He turned to the other guard, and offered his amusement in an unusually casual voice, "I thought it was bullshit. The whole *eloping* thing." He said it like he was talking about the weather, "It's almost laughable, if it weren't for the horror of it."

His friend didn't seem to share his fun. Will would've thought he was being a professional, and adhering to not chatting shit around a man you've just watched slaughter the majority of

your colleagues, but then he huffed out a: "*Hm. Addams Family Values.*"

That was actually something to laugh about. Would've released the tension a little bit. But no one did.

It lapsed back into silence, spare the grumble of the engine and distant wailing of half a dozen police cruisers. Will just looked down at his red hands, stretched his fingers. The skin felt sucked dry. He wished he had some kind of window to look out of.

"Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham." He piped up again, not looking back to Will, "Or, maybe they changed their names." He looked back at him then, as if he'd just asked him a question.

Will absently wondered how many peoples DNA he had on him at that moment. If he had any of Hannibal's left.

The guard leant closer, "You do know he's bad news. Don't you?"

They'd fixed him with a plastic mask on his face, the straps digging into his scalp when he moved his jaw to speak, "*Oh, no.*" That startled him. Will looked up at him, prettily: "He's just my husband."

Merely two weeks after the initial recapture, after the bureau and local authorities had tried to keep it on the down-low as much as possible, the press had to be addressed. Jack Crawford sat in his office, desk swathed in file after file, and took off his glasses to pinch the bridge of his nose. The whole ordeal was quite literally giving him a headache.

Once they'd cast hooks fishing for information, since they finally had a grasp on a handful of their crimes now they were behind bars (or, just Lecter's, so they thought- and, well, somewhat still did) the reports hadn't stopped coming. A couple were butchered and posed like Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* in Peru; a man was hung up by his ankles on a meat hook in a church outside of Milan; a series of brutalised corpses found in the sea along the western coast of France; four heads without bodies, each missing either their eyes, ears, tongue, or all three, balanced on a bridge in Indonesia. They'd had previous sightings and possible murders, but not on enough grounds to try to confirm, travel, and go through the translator-reliant method of taking over an investigation that may or may not be linked to a case they considered cold *four fucking years ago*. Well, it wasn't ever necessarily cold, just--neglected.

Jack was lucky his career was still intact. There were smaller fish to fry. And there wasn't much he could've done.

He'd never had to tackle slews of crime cross-continent, coming in from every law enforcement from Cuba to Amsterdam, in order to track movements made over the span of four years. He hoped he'd never had to do it again. Or hoped he would be a victim of one, to save himself the paperwork.

Upon their arrival back in the states, Hannibal had been plopped straight back to his rightful place in the BSHCI with a handful of more federal charges, and added time. Not that he

needed any more. Doctor Chilton threw all of his toys out of the cot about it, but it didn't accomplish anything apart from a few more doors between Hannibal and the outside world. Just to be safe. As if that would stop him.

As far as he was concerned, Jack was happy to leave him in that hole to die, and never have to see him again for the rest of his life. He'd let him go.

Will wouldn't be so easily let go.

They'd miraculously managed to keep the case out of court, avoiding a circus show. The plea bargain was arranged within the initial two days. The defence argued Will's case as one of victimhood: touching on his past encephalitis affliction causing long-term issues; claimed that he was exhibiting symptoms of Stockholm's; that he was dealing with heaps of trauma bonding, and that he'd been held forcibly for *years* of his life, *away* from his loving family, all at the murderous hands of Hannibal *the Cannibal* Lecter-- the whole nine yards. Even the obvious brutality shown at the shootout was put down to diminished capacity. They claimed he hadn't spoken a word.

The bureau wanted it hushed up and put to rest in a quiet back room, like a wailing, unwanted child. No fuss.

Attentively, Jack watched Will's silent stoicism throughout, and thought him vacant. He didn't ask where Will had been sent away to once the not-guilty verdict came through. But he burned to know.

Being the head of the unit that championed the investigation (and because the deputy director was indisposed, apparently) he had to take the lead in the first press conference. He'd done such things before, a couple of times, but never about something that big.

It would be like walking into lions' den.

"Does Will Graham know about his wife?"

Just as Jack was heading back, after they'd herded out all of the reporters, the question was shoved in his direction along with a recording device. Freddie Lounds had waited for him to speak in private, because, of course she had.

She scurried after him when he turned a corner away from her: "Does he know she and her son had to undergo witness protection? Moved out of the country? Taken their dogs away with her?" Jack sighed, and stopped to listen to her, benedictory. She remained as cool as a cucumber under his gaze: "Or, I suppose they're not necessarily shared with him anymore. Considering his death certificate. Second one she's got- pity, to ruin such a lovely marriage."

The official narrative (that was somewhat true) was that Will was lost in the line of duty, at some point between Lecter's escape and the discovery of Dolarhyde's body. He was presumed dead, then once time had elapsed with no sign of him but a dead dragon and his blood at the edge of a cliff, he was *dead in absentia*. The authorities acted accordingly to make it so. No loose ends.

And, as intended, Jack didn't believe that he'd died. Refused to go to the funeral without a body in the casket.

After a couple of years of radio silence, his hope waned as it always did, and he half-expected to find him in bits and pieces; in a psychological sense, or in the cold, unforgiving form of reality. But instead, he'd found him whole, and wide awake.

There was no way he wasn't aware, to some extent. Jack knew that look in his eye.

He didn't know if it would've been better to not find him at all.

"I hate to say I told you so." Freddie smiled, all sweetness and light.

"Is it better or worse to ask you where you got that information?"

She narrowed her eyes, smirked, "For you: worse."

He nodded once, and went to move away, but she still held the gall to stop him. He let himself be ambushed, and sighed again, briefly looked up at the sky. Looked like rain.

"Has he mentioned her? Does he even *care*?"

Jack weighed the statement in his own mind, but offered nothing to Freddie but indifference, "I don't know."

"Okay. What about what happened to Doctor DuMaurier? A long-standing rivalry ending in revenge?" Her smile gave her away, "Or, was that all Doctor Lecter, too?"

"We both know I can't tell you that, Miss Lounds, even if I knew the answers to the questions you're asking." She stepped in front of him again.

"You might not be able to, but I know someone who can," She tilted her head like a hopeful dog, "Let me do an interview with Will Graham."

"Will Graham is not stable enough to be talking to anyone but a psychiatrist right now."

"Old habits die hard?"

Jack could be severe, but he was rarely impolite. Freddie had a knack for testing him on that: "And, after everything, I think he would remain just as reluctant to see you, as I am to let him."

"I'm not asking."

He considered her, and then understood: "Your plan is to blackmail the Federal Bureau of Investigation?"

"No, not the entire bureau- of which you're lucky to still be a part of. And I don't like the term blackmail. I prefer incentivise." Her unflinching determination really hadn't changed, despite

every bright red warning put straight in front of her face, "Now. Which type of centre is he at again? Rehab, or psych?"

Jack didn't like her menace. But he knew an empty threat when he heard one. He took the recorder from her gloved hand, turned it off, and ruined the hope it gave her: "You aren't getting into that hospital, Miss Lounds." It was as if he'd snatched the air right out of her throat. He moved to enter the building.

"I'll get that interview!"

Pausing, amazed by her resolve, he turned back to her and mimicked her earlier tone as he said: "You'll be lucky to still be a part of this world if you do." He then held the door open for some agents, and followed them inside.

Chapter End Notes

Let's find out how Will's getting on, shall we? I can already tell you that Hannibal is having a blast.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

My imagination is a monastery, and I am its monk.

You must explain my metaphors to yourself.

-John Keats, *To Percy Shelley*

Jack gets a call after Will's roommate is found dead. Hannibal endures therapy at the hands of Doctor Chilton, and it doesn't go as planned.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Six weeks into his second stint at another in-house patient facility (a fancy and more favourable way of saying psychiatric ward) Will was slammed face down onto the floor by the hospital staff. He chose not to resist. He watched a limp hand opposite his face twitch like roadkill.

It had been three and a half straight months of vaulted ceilings, and plywood frame beds, and scheduled days, and sodium-yellow lights, and security guards staring, and terrible food, and nighttime screams, and thinking, and thinking, and *thinking*, and, frankly, he'd had enough.

It had been so long since he'd seen and smelt blood. He felt relief more than anything. It was funny how it made the place feel homely. Alive.

Jack, halfway through his lunch, was called in his office to inform him that Will Graham's roommate was found dead. They'd put him in solitary, in which he would remain indefinitely.

It seemed like they just didn't know what else to do with him.

"I'm surprised you didn't bring me any flowers." Was the first thing Will said upon the door shutting behind him. They'd let them speak in a small room for one-on-one therapy on the same ward. After being hauled off of the floor, Will was stripped bare and hosed down. The water was cold and forceful enough that it hurt. He was then redressed in white, and chained up like a dog to stop him snapping, but it didn't stop the sharpness of his tongue, "Aren't you sorry for my loss?"

Jack folded his hands onto the table, a penance of sorts. Will eyed the file to his right, *his* file, an incident report peaking from it's cover: "I think it would be more of a loss to me than to you, Will."

"How?"

"It costs more for me to come all the way down here when you decide to act up."

Will sat back in his seat, cuffed hands clinking into his lap, "You aren't my father, Jack. You don't need to come all the way down here to clean up after me." They looked at each other squarely, and Jack felt the sting land.

He'd thought Will looked meeker, and more tired than he'd ever seen him when he'd come in the door. He then wondered if that was the point, to make him feel guilty.

"Was it you who I have to clean up after?"

"That's entirely dependent on who you ask."

"I'm asking you."

The red-raw exhaustion present in his eyes sung when he looked up, and the garish brightness of the light hit his face hard. His pallor matched the cream shade of his uniform. Purple under the eyes as if he'd been punched. His hair had begun to grow back from when his head had been shaved last.

He didn't look pitiful, he just looked sick. Jack almost thought he belonged there.

"You should've brought flowers. They cut the thorns off of the roses." He said finally, looking back at him then, the sight of him marginally less upsetting, and more scary, "Then they try to do the same to all of us."

Jack sighed at length. He didn't like seeing him: "What did you do, Will?"

"The question on everybody's lips, Jack." He sneered, easing back in his chair.

"What happened to the man you shared a room with?"

"He died."

"Do you know how?"

"No." He sighed, disliking the interrogative line of questioning. Despite his irritating amount of experience in the matter, he didn't like to be made to feel like a criminal. *Foresight beats hindsight*: "I know it was messy."

"Did you kill him, Will?" He looked at him with a mixture of vitriol and openness, like he'd just been slapped across his face. Then it eased, and he looked away, down, back to his face, but not his eyes. His gaze fell to the noticeable scar on Jack's neck peering above his collar.

"You would believe me if I said otherwise. *Eventually*." He chided, obtrusively clinical, "But they certainly wouldn't. Too big of a risk."

"Why not?"

He said it very matter-of-factly: "Suicides have the tendency to cluster."

That appeared to enlighten him, "You're telling me he slit his own throat?"

"You and I both know stranger things have happened. And we are in a mental facility."

Jack conceded, but didn't fully believe him. He knew Will had the ability to lie to him, and he would easily be lied to.

He also knew he couldn't stay there. Seemed like they'd have to find somewhere he would behave himself, if such a place existed. Then he recalled the report, "Why did you have his blood all over you?"

Will looked down at his hands, scrubbed cleaned. He thought of the scar tissue on Jack's neck. Terrible, terrible wounds.

"Do I need to spell it out?"

Hannibal tested the movement of his arms under the ties to his chair, just because he could. They creaked but didn't let him wiggle. The same was true for his legs and head. They were tight enough.

In the dim, creeping light of the room, it looked like he was posed that way to be propped up, and the chair underneath him was his shadow. An attending nurse prepared a needle just behind his head, and Doctor Chilton sat directly in front of him, a few feet placed between them, to act as a moat.

Despite the reconstruction of his face, eyelids and all, Frederick Chilton was left with a lisp. His words *spilled*. As if Francis Dolarhyde had left a part of himself, in place of what he had taken.

It amused Hannibal to no end.

He rested his familiar walking cane against his leg, held a notebook in his more withered hand. They'd done a remarkable job on his face. The only real tells were the noticeable wig, and the gummy skin on his right hand. And he was too vain to wear an eyepatch, and couldn't use contacts anymore. He stayed away from harsh lights, back and forth like a moth, but Hannibal knew his milky left eye was watching him in the shadows.

It gave him a new edge. Finally, something *interesting*: "Your better half is causing quite a stir, Hannibal."

Hannibal smiled at him then, entertained by both him and his words, "Then it is a good afternoon indeed, Frederick."

He started the tape to record the session: "Do you want to talk about Will Graham today?"

"Do you?"

He looked up at him then, blind on one side. Unseeing. It was *poetry*, "I'm not legally permitted to tell you anything about Will Graham. Or what happens to him. You aren't to

know anything about him anymore." That sentence didn't seem complete: "That is, outside of therapeutic treatment." There it is. Sly as a snake.

"I would expect nothing less of you."

He posed with his pen, "What can you tell me about him?"

"A better question would be, what I *can't*."

"Close, I see?" It was bold of him not to shy away from sibilance. Hannibal didn't know whether it was out of perseverance, or too much pride. Either way, it evoked neither pity nor awe, "But I will ask that, then. What can't you say?"

"And I will politely refuse to answer."

At that, Chilton sighed, and the man fiddling behind Hannibal flicked the syringe in his hand, "Amobarbital. Should help with your answers." Chilton nodded the go-ahead.

Hannibal closed his eyes as the needle was pushed into his arm. A hot-cold sensation blared straight to his heart, and it curled in his chest like a flame.

Chilton got up out of his seat, and unsteadily came over to assist the nurse. When he looked back at Hannibal, he'd opened his eyes again. And he was watching him. Face as still as a mask.

Christ.

Thankful for the restraints, he hobbled back to his side of the room instead of dithering, "You needn't be so skittish, Frederick," He smiled, "I prefer medium rare."

That unsettled him more than he let on: "How are you feeling?"

Hannibal sighed, somehow still thoughtful, "I'm feeling the effects of the *truth serum* you've just administered. Unconventional of you." He tested the movement of his fingers, and reckoned his reflexes had probably suffered none: "I feel as though it's a wasted venture, considering these tests aren't often admissible in court."

"You haven't left us with many other options. You know all the tricks." He intoned, unenthused, "Tell me. Do you believe Will Graham is capable of murder?"

"We're all capable of murder, Doctor Chilton." His speech was slower, but not slurred, "All behaviour is dependent on willingness, and circumstance."

"So, is that yes?"

He looked at him narrowly, "You can't expect me to answer questions with yes or no, Frederick. That would be beneath me."

"That's exactly what I expect of you."

"You'll have to expect disappointment, then." One nod, and the dosage was upped. Hannibal's lips curled as he was injected again, muscles tensing, only to relax. Sedation wavered on the horizon like a white-tipped wave, and Hannibal's amusement with it all was downright palpable. Not the reaction he wanted.

"Are you aware that Will Graham has ever knowingly committed murder?"

Hannibal, vaguely, wondered what Will himself would say to that. *Too many to name, too many to name. Wouldn't you just love to know.* Instead of offering that, he ignored the question, pretending to not be awake enough to respond. Tiredly, he shut his eyes and felt the fog in his head.

"Hannibal?"

He rolled his eyes forward to glare at Chilton, who froze like a doe at the point of a rifle, "I'm not telling you that, Doctor Chilton-- I'm giving considerable thought to eating your face, at this moment."

The response was that of a man about to ruin his underwear, "I--"

"I can't decide on a... French, caramelised onion. Or, a goat's cheese dipping sauce." Hannibal pondered, smiling, struggling to stay afloat, but not struggling enough: "I can give you the recipes?"

Chapter End Notes

"We tried sodium amytal on him three years ago to find where he buried a Princeton student; he gave 'em a recipe for chip dip."

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

I cannot make you understand.

I cannot make anyone understand what is happening inside me. I cannot even explain it to myself.

-Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*

Will is referred to the BSHCI. Alana is interrupted from her work by Chilton.

Chapter Notes

Alana Bloom, red lip and hair styled down, in a black lace collared shirt, black suit trousers, and white "men's" suspenders. Thank you for your time.

"We have a new house guest." His syrupy speech entered the room before he did. Alana looked up from her desk to see Chilton as he toddled in, the click of his cane on the floor to punctuate, "He'd be very happy to see you."

"I doubt that." She sighed, continuing the patient write-up of her latest therapy session. She wasn't in the mood to talk, least of all about this, "Did you want something, Frederick?"

"Word from Will Graham's latest session is that Hannibal once replicated the wax figures from the Museo de la Medicina Mexicana."

That caught her attention, "What did he say about it?"

"That it makes it more disturbing if you don't know which ones." Alana pursed her lips to stop herself smiling. She sighed a little, fond and disbelieving.

"He wouldn't hold up as a credible source, but I can certainly ask Jack if it rings any bells." She concluded, trying to dismiss him as casually as she could. Instead, he ignored her deflecting glare, and sat down in the chair opposite her desk.

Clearly unwelcoming to his presence, she sighed more openly, and carried on writing, in hopes of him vanishing once more.

"You don't seriously believe he is as tortured as he seems?" If he put his hand on or touched anything on her desk, she planned to stab him with her pen, "Do his actions really speak of a

man who was out of his mind?"

"It's not *about* what I believe." She finished her sentence with a small flourish, and closed her book so he couldn't read the notes anymore: "I think Will knows what he's doing, and he knew that what he did would get him in here. I'm just not so sure that his actions are *entirely* a result of Hannibal's influence."

"They're both as bad as each other, if you ask me."

"I wouldn't ask you." She stood to rearrange the papers and books on her desk, and retrieved a pile of letters from that morning. She could feel him watching her, but in a critical, beady-eyed way. It wasn't obscene. With anyone else, she'd pity him for wanting to talk to her, but she knew he was only talking to her to get his own opinion out. Still, she saw no harm in throwing him a bone, "Is he improving?"

"If by *improving*, you mean becoming responsive, then yes. If you mean being coherent and helpful, no." Alana had hoped he'd stop there, but she must've forgotten who she was talking to, "The rehab stint got him labelled with anything that would stick. PTSD. Stockholm's Syndrome. Any possible dissociative disorder, cleverly made to explain away any wrongdoing he might've had a hand in." He straightened out a crease on the leg of his suit, readjusted. He was talking like she hadn't read the files before giving them to him, "Nothing official, of course. One solid diagnosis, and he'd be tied up in treatment, whether he liked it or not. Kept far away from *you-know-who*, never to be seen again. He knows his play."

"He did learn from the best." Alana said, half-distracted by reading, half-listening. She scribbled something on an envelope.

"Doesn't make anything easier. They can't treat what they can't identify."

"*They?*" She looked back at him briefly, and folded the letter back up, "I thought you'd want to oversee his treatment yourself, given your history of..." *No better way to say it*, "Bitter resentment."

He let that sit for a moment, finding himself unable to defend, "The first time I tried, it was long sullen silence, followed by insulting me, then more silence." Alana didn't smile, but there was something on her face that held a similar sentiment, "The second time I tried, he simply told me to fuck off."

"Did you try medicating him?" She asked, instead of asking *isn't that a long time coming?*

"The drugs we've tried only made him woozy enough to admit to vague, nonsensical things, that only he seems to understand." He grumbled, irritable, "He entertains himself."

Will's reaction had been bright, Easter-pink euphoria. His mind going solely where he wanted to go, for the first time in his life. They'd had to force his hands down and tie them to the arms of the chairs to keep him calm.

"Try new methods, then. Different doses. I shouldn't have to tell you how to do your job, Doctor Chilton."

"No, you shouldn't, Doctor Bloom. A confession wouldn't do much good now, anyway."

"We aren't trying to get him to confess to anything." She corrected, "He'd be useful to incriminate Hannibal. Or at least help everyone understand what exactly has been done to him for the last few years. It's the cases that need closing."

"Or what exactly *he* has done to *others*. That would explain why he's not more forthcoming." He pointed out, fingers drumming on the top of his cane, "One more incrimination wouldn't be much of a weight on Lecter, regardless of who it comes from."

"It wouldn't matter much to either of them. Depending on your beliefs." Alana would've liked to be with the majority in thinking that Will fell more into the Hannibal Lecter Victim category, then he did accomplice. But having witnessed what they brought out in each other, in retrospect or hidden understanding, she leaned towards the opposite.

"Hannibal didn't act alone. That length of time together? That relationship?" It was as if he was giving a voice to Alana's own thoughts, "Will is his protégé. And his protection, it seems."

Alana didn't like the idea of agreeing with the man in front of her. But he was touching on a very real argument, "Maybe." Non-committal, but not too flimsy to be thought of as disagreement. If she placated him, perhaps he'd leave sooner.

She flicked through the letters, and threw a couple in the bin beside her. She caught how his gaze fell to them, prying. He looked back up to her, then away.

"Agent Crawford certainly isn't convinced." He gingerly got up and tapped his way to the window to linger by it, "Fool me once. I wonder what happens after three times?"

"Jack has never been sure how to broach Will. And when it comes to Will and Hannibal, I think he refuses the truth. Always opts for practicality over emotionality. Comes with the job." Chilton turned back to her, piqued.

"I wouldn't say his methods are always the most practical. Especially where Will is concerned."

"He doesn't learn from his mistakes." She stated, unabashed, and he supposed she'd probably say the same thing, even if he stood in the room with them, "Even the people he thought he'd let die, keep coming back from the dead. It's hard to feel enough guilt after that to change your behaviour."

"What behaviour should he change, then?"

Alana tapped her pen on her desk, mindful with her words, "He should stop trying to redeem him."

No more broken man with a brain on fire, who was too filled up with bloodied dead-girl ghosts to stand up straight. No more pitiful, overworked, pitifully-sweet Will, shaking with

solid motion, dreams sticking out of him like pin bones. Not even the put-together, capable version who seemed fuelled by righteous anger, his heart always in the right place.

Maybe all those people were false. Maybe they never knew him at all.

Jack could recognise him, but not really, not inwardly, and that cut deeper than any knife could.

"Have *you* stopped trying?" Chilton posited, disrupting Alana's blank middle-distance thinking. She blinked once, twice. Looked at him like he'd spat on the floor, then reigned herself in.

"I think I'm more concerned with his other half." She shrugged off, writing.

"Ah, yes." He could see she was busy, and wanted to appear that way, and he just didn't care. Wobbly, he went over as if to survey what she was up to, "They even made that official. Legal. Do you think that was one of Hannibal's little tricks of the mind? Or is it one of God's?"

"Their relationship has always been complicated. I'm not their marriage councillor."

"I suppose that falls to me, then?" She smiled to him then, kindly. He finally turned to leave. But then, "Do you still hold yourself responsible?" He looked back before the door, curious, "For Will Graham?" It was the first time in a while that she felt anger. The seething kind, that grinds teeth.

"No."

"But you do hear the stories from the academy?"

She could feel her temper thrumming under her skin, as if it would push it's way out, like feathers. Not the right time. She sighed, tightly, and got back to writing: "I don't put my trust in rumours, Doctor Chilton."

"I don't think you care about the cases being solved, Doctor Bloom, I think you just need to find reasons to detach yourself."

"I'm not your patient, Frederick."

"Maybe you should be." He slunk his way back over. Now he was trying to rile her up, "Do you think the body count was worth their recapture?" No response, "If they weren't caught, do you think they would've come back for you?"

Without warning, Alana was up on her feet, and smacked a file down on the desk, making him jump. She waited for him to pick it up, "All that blood wasn't poetic, Frederick. It was just red." He reluctantly took the file, a sudden meagreness like a child, "And I wouldn't want to call security on you."

"Being smart spoils a lot of things, doesn't it?" He hissed, puerile.

"You have no idea."

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

How many people do you think I am?

Pretend I am somebody else.

-Talking Heads, *Swamp*

Jack tries to persuade Will to accept therapy, and asks for any more information on Hannibal's crimes. They come to an agreement. Or do they?

Chapter Notes

POOR JACK I'M SORRY JACK

A cellar spider was crawling across the ceiling. One gangly leg after the other, tip-toeing. Will watched it crawl, and itched the scar on his cheek, his stubble tickling it. The more he looked, the more itchy he felt. He felt spiders inside his clothes.

"Hello, Jack." He said, without looking at him. He wondered if the spider was trying to reach the light to crawl inside the bulb, "You seem different."

Will turned around to him, got up from his cot to match the balanced stare that greeted him, "You don't, from the last time I saw you in hospital."

His outfit was completely different, and he'd shaved his head again, to distress. He wasn't referring to the physical: "But I do seem different, from the last time you saw me in *here*." It fell short of being a question, but Jack indulged him.

"Yes. You do." He said, solemn, "How have I changed, in your eyes?"

Will tilted his head a little. The way Hannibal did, "You look older." He said simply, omitting details, and scowled, "Did Bella knit you that sweater?"

Jack's smile was a tight line, "She did."

He nodded, considerate, "It's-- nice."

Given the true depth and breadth of what Will was accustomed to seeing, and how he saw, Jack was hesitant to pry on what he thought of him. Either he was being honest, or his perceptions had shifted, with aid of retrospect and a good helping of indignation. But he

probably came to the conclusions all on his own. God knows he doesn't like to be told what to think.

Ever the alligator, Jack explained: "I stayed here and grew up. You went away, and stayed the same."

Will smiled passably, surprised by him, "I'm not the same."

"No, I think you are. In a lot of ways; in ways I didn't want to accept." He nodded to himself, regret and ire curling over each other, "But I don't feel I know you. And I haven't, for a long, *long* time."

Will swallowed that. Opened his mouth to speak, only to close it again.

Jack had made peace with the idea, like he was estranged family member; linked, but not bonded, and too far gone to build a relationship with. But it would be a lie to say he didn't see the grief on Will's face, and feel it resonate within himself.

After all that had happened, and what they'd both endured, the kinship they shared, it was-- a shame. A damn shame.

"You're not responding well to therapy, I've heard. Have you got something to hide?"

"What makes you think therapy could give you what I'm hiding?" Will had started to restlessly pace behind the bars, like a stir-crazy circus animal. Not enough company. Not enough room, "If I am, that is."

"I think it's a reasonable place to start."

"I don't." He retorted, weirdly inscrutable when he turned to him.

"You were sentenced to psychiatric treatment, Will. If you refuse that treatment, you could be sentenced to a lot worse." But he already knew that. That wasn't his main concern. And it wasn't why Jack was there: "Why do you keep asking to see Hannibal?"

"You know why," He dismissed, and the slow pacing of his cell stopped: "And I know what you're here for, Jack." There was a shift, and Will's hurt was veiled over when he looked back up at him. Not daring to look too long: "You can get on with it."

"What's that?"

"Information. On *Doctor Hannibal Lecter*." He sighed, admired the spiders progress, "That's all it's ever really been about."

Harsh. But not unjust.

"What more is there to say?"

"Oh, *you* caught him. For *real*, this time. What more could you possibly want?" He could think of a few things. To see him die, for one. Any attempts thus far hadn't worked out.

Will revelled in that knowledge. He wondered if the same would extend to him, if he knew what he'd done.

"You tell me, Will. Why are you both so quiet about what's happened?"

Will's brow furrowed, patronising, "Why? Does it make you nervous?"

"It makes me impatient."

"That makes two of us." He noted, then said: "When Hannibal was being cuffed on the floor, and he looked up and saw you, and he spoke to you. He didn't even raise his voice, did he?"

Jack was thrown for a loop. Will could tell that was a no.

"And when you tied him up like a mad dog in the back of that van, cage and all, he didn't put up a fight." He moved slowly towards the bars, "Did he?"

Jack was reluctant to respond, "Not like you did."

"Then, you should understand why he left you alone. Why he ran, and why he hid."

Jack took that in stride, correcting him, "You both did."

"This isn't about me. I had my own reasons." He fixed him with a look, right in his eyes. Straight through him: "He was being kind."

There was stil no cooperation from Will in regards to therapy. The final time, once he'd outlasted the number of times Frederick could take no for an answer, they tried to do it by force. When they were getting cuffs on him, he slipped one hand free and zipped around; slammed the orderly up against the wall by his neck before they stabbed sedative into his.

He'd pushed the grated side of the undone cuff into his eye socket.

The only negotiation he offered was a chance to see Hannibal. That was refused, immediately. Naturally. Until he reaffirmed that he'd be as relaxed and as helpful as they liked, they need only house them together. Wouldn't hurt another soul. Would give them names.

You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours.

At least Hannibal was bearable. Copacetic, even. There had barely been a peep out of him since Will arrived at the hospital, and he hadn't even been told about it. It was like he could sense him, in some unknowably carnal way. And, to pretty much everyone's surprise, he hadn't attacked anyone, and was more than willing to engage in treatment (even if it was purely for his own enjoyment). In a lot of ways, he was a model patient.

The fact Will Graham- the Will Graham *that didn't kill all those people*- was causing more stress and being a bigger Problem Child than a world-renowned cannibal really was ridiculous. Not only that, but the money. The threat of lawsuits from anyone he had attacked,

just because he felt like it- and could easily do so again, to any of the other staff, if the mood took him- was more of an issue than his bargaining. Truthfully, the situation was on the verge boiling over.

After a little over a week of sitting on the idea, and the spider had curled up like a shadowy fist in the lightbulb, it was decided that they'd meet his demands.

But not entirely.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Oh, well, being conflicted means you can live a shallow life without copping to be a shallow person.

-Gillian Flynn, *Sharp Objects*

The product of the agreement struck with Will is a whole new brand of torture. Chilton rubs salt in the wound (or tries to). Alana observes them, and even from a safe distance and plenty of walls between them, Hannibal still manages to get under her skin.

Chapter Notes

In Fahrenheit 451, there's a character called Clarisse. I'll say no more.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A buzzer sounded, and a noise of metal whirring like the whole building had sighed, and Frederick Chilton's cane clacked against the floor. Tap. Tap. Tap. As the door eased open, he approached, looking from his right to his left, right again. He was smiling. No one else was.

"I copyrighted *Hannibal the Cannibal*, but I have to say, *Will the Cannibal* doesn't have the same ring to it." Will was on the left side of the room, and only glanced up from his lonely copy of Fahrenheit 451 to look at him. Hannibal was over the other side, stood with his hands clasped behind his back, like a diligent schoolboy.

Between them, stood a wall.

"Miss Lounds was probably more apt in her description of your relationship." He mused, too smug for his own good, "What was the phrase she used? Murder Husbands? Allegedly, my apologies." Hannibal, for one reason or another, smiled at him.

"Good morning, Doctor Chilton. What is it that you want?"

"I was considering lengthening my thesis into a novel." He said, "A photo of you both separated, even from each other, would be more than romantic." He felt the heat of Will's eyes without looking at him. Hannibal inclined his head, vulturelike.

"I don't think it would do you well to write yet another book, considering the rebuttals towards the last." Specifically, his rebuttal. That dampened his pride a little.

"I've written more since your... *departure*," All of which were flops, and Hannibal knew as much, "But now you've returned, I'd be more than willing to conduct an interview. For publication purposes only, of course."

"And the attention would be on us, or for you?" He hadn't expected Will to respond.

"Why not both? It's what you want, isn't it? The glamour. The controversy." He spoke more to Hannibal when Will scoffed at him, turning around on his cot to lay facing away: "You're certainly not getting much of that in here."

"How about you remove the wall, and then we'll talk?"

"I could be persuaded." He was probably lying: "If you let me have the insight I can use."

Will craned his neck to give him an incredulous look, "Into what? Our *marriage*?" He feigned offence, "You don't seem like the type for pillow-talk, Frederick. As unlikely as it is that you'll be having any." He turned a page, "I thought you would've learnt not to be so crude."

Chilton sighed, strung along, "I mean the murders."

"Ah, yes. *Those*."

Hannibal noticeably mulled it over, "I think the rewards of such a publication wouldn't get past the extra few locked doors between us, and the big wide world. And besides, I'm not looking to feed into vanity." He stepped forward, conspiratorially, "Megalomania is a sickness, you know."

Will almost inhaled his own spit.

It was met with an uneasy bark of laughter, "I'd be wrong to deny a successful book's effect on my ego. As would be the case for any prevailing author *who--*"

"The longing need to be noticed is often miscalled an ego, Frederick." Will countered easily, the smile on his face going flaccid.

"*I would--*"

"If it isn't obvious, the consensus is a no." Hannibal told him, thoroughly amused. Will shared his smile.

"Rejection. Isn't that familiar?"

"And don't draw attention to yourself, Doctor Chilton." Hannibal warned, expression deceptively kind, "Who knows what could happen."

When he stood there, dumbfounded, about to muster an argument, Hannibal took the opportunity to wink at him. His silence turned sour. He left as hurriedly as he could after that, disturbed beyond belief.

Will turned on his back and fanned the book over his chest: "Is he gone?" He asked, not bothering to check.

"Yes."

"Hm. Why is it always the pretty ones?"

Hannibal moved around his desk to continue drawing. Will could hear when the pencil began shushing: "I'll make an effort not to be insulted."

"You do just that."

If he didn't look at the wall dividing them, he could imagine them in the same room. He closed his eyes, and it was no longer there. Hannibal was sitting just behind him, in touching distance, drawing him from life. A dog snoozing on the floor between his feet. Both of them wearing normal clothes, and the matching rings that were taken from them. A fire dwindling in a hearth. It warmed him.

When they'd reconfigured the cells, and Chilton claimed that they would wholeheartedly agree to Will's terms, it felt too good to be true. But, if he could see Hannibal once, just briefly, it'd be better than never seeing him again.

They didn't even afford him that luxury.

They moved him into the cell beside Hannibal when he was unconscious, in the middle of the night, purposefully, as it still smelt of new plaster and the dust of construction. Hannibal was woken up by the door opening, and he could hear the wheeling in of the backboard, but couldn't see a thing. Carefully, he got out of his bed, and approached the glass. His senses were failing him- the darkness too heavy to see through. He breathed deep, and sensed Will in the dark.

It was a whole new breed of torture, to know the other person was there without being able to do so much as look at them. But, despite that, Will was glad they didn't have the imagination to make the divider transparent, too.

Alana kept an eye on them on the monitors. To her intrigue, it seemed they would do things at the same time, without communicating at all.

Sleeping, eating, reading, all done in tandem. Organically. As if they were able to know what the other was doing just by a change in the air of the room, or some strange connection she didn't understand. A Morticia-and-Gomez, unnatural connection, that most would shy away from.

It was almost enough to believe the theory of a telepathic element that was used residually to explain their parallel surrender. Will had suggested it in a vague way when probed about how exactly they'd done it. That spread around the academy like wildfire. It had snowballed from there. Other theories ranged from them planning murder-dance choreography, to the whole thing being set up, to Hannibal being able to sense that Will had knelt down (a bizarre and

provocative idea in and of itself), and neither of them had done anything to dispel such wonderings. If anything, Hannibal was glad for them to be gossiped about- Will less so, but he fuelled most of it anyway.

A lot of the time, Will sat by the wall- sometimes occupied, sometimes not- and spoke to him like a man praying at confessional. Hannibal drew intricate Italian architecture and landscapes of the vast ocean; along with Will, in such eidetic detail he may as well have been sat in front of him.

It was anything, from the turn of his hand, to a look in his eye that Alana couldn't recognise, but Chilton was inexplicably disturbed by. An unaware full-body portrait: him hiding his face with a book or a finger; or eating fruit on a sun lounger by the pool, or splayed out in bed amongst knotted sheets. Suggestive in some, but not explicit. Always beautiful. It seemed he knew him better than his mirror-image.

Will told him in increments and slices about his experiences in the psychiatric wards- *I may have been lightly punched. How is it different from being regular punched, you may ask? It's different because I say it is-* and his assault on a member of staff. His pride about the violence was pungent. But then, that came as no surprise at all. Alana didn't laugh at the jokes. She listened to him talk, saw his face, noticed his mannerisms-- but she didn't feel his *presence*. It was hard to recognise his voice in the words he was saying. Like he was a different person altogether. Or she was watching an old recording, and he had gone mad.

As he was drawing, and they had lulled into a pause, Hannibal abruptly said: "The basic human need to be watched was once satisfied by God."

Alana's chest tightened as Will looked up at the camera in his cell, brow raised, staring back at her.

"And God can be said to not feel empathy, or pity, or love for us, because those are human characteristics that God does not contain. Apathy and passivity are essential. But some would argue the necessity of a God who lacks the ability to intervene." Hannibal continued, finishing his drawing, before looking placidly to the camera that watched over him: "Are you playing a God, Doctor Bloom? Or are you simply too scared to show yourself?"

Will's laughter quietly hummed through the headphones. Alana slammed the laptop shut.

Chapter End Notes

I giveth and I taketh away. But just you waitth.

Also, thank you so much for all the kudos and comments and love. I didn't expect it at all. I could cry at every given one of them. It means a lot.

If you ever think I should write something you like or want to see with Will and Hannibal, just lemme know, I'm always up for some prompts/people-pleasing. Big Love

Energy to you all.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

In this perfect design, where do we fit?
Which piece of the puzzle are we?
-Shane Koyczan, *Shoulders*

There is a meeting in Chilton's office. Hannibal Lecter has a visitor, for the first time.
And Clarice Starling won't be scared off so easily.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Doctor Chilton, this is Agent Starling. She's here to conduct the interview."

Dead leaves were picked up by the wind and smattered across the windows. Jack took his seat in Chilton's office. Thought about every time he'd sat there, and who he'd been with.

Hands were shaken, a little reluctantly, and Frederick smiled, "I don't believe any patient here has seen a woman in years. Apart from Doctor Bloom. And even then, she can only see a select few." He studied her as she sat down, "You're his taste, so-to-speak."

Clarice carded a hand through the top of her auburn hair, pushing it away from her face. The blue of her eyes almost as piercing as Chilton's blinded one. She gave him no emotion to go off: "I'm inclined to believe that his taste isn't discriminatory, sir."

He remained smiling, but it wasn't polite anymore. She registered Jack giving her a cursory glance, asking her to reign it in: "No. But you have wit, too. He likes that."

"Agent Starling is only here to consult on the case." Jack amended, reclaiming authority of the room, "Their relationship won't extend beyond these walls. And it certainly won't extend to being a personal one, Doctor." He said it as if it was guided towards her. *That* would make sense.

"You seem to forget, Agent Crawford, that Hannibal Lecter doesn't *do* professional relationships." He looked back at Clarice, "Never has."

Clarice didn't like how he said his name. Like there was a foul taste in his mouth, like, that name, loaded and poisonous, had crawled it's way up and out of his throat with the bile of his memory. It reminded her of how her colleagues back at Quantico had joked with her over a lunch she was worried would resurface, saying how little they envied her position. And that she should say goodbye to her life as it was, or, at the very least, a limb.

They'd called her *fresh meat*.

Jack sighed, "He can start here. If not, we pull her out."

Fresh meat, that could very quickly begin to rot.

"Well, if you do, I sure hope it isn't too late this time." He noted, weirdly smug. It was no help to her uneasiness. She'd decided that she didn't like Doctor Chilton. He reminded her of a badly sewn-up hand puppet, used as comedy relief in a children's show. She hated puppets. And he kept talking down to her. *At* and *about* her, instead of just *to* her: "But I doubt you'd get a repeat of the last time."

Jack glared at him, not finding it funny. Clarice doubted he would yell, or even shed his easy courtesy to set him straight, but the look was equally as threatening. She denied the tickling need to cough, fearing that her trachea could close up entirely, or she would bring up more than air.

The awkward mood in the room drew out for a long, long moment, until Clarice found the courage to clear her throat, slung her bag back over her shoulder, and stood up, "I'd like to see him now, Doctor." No *please*. He could beg for her manners if he wanted.

Even though he plainly didn't have to, Doctor Chilton escorted her through the various doors towards Lecter's cell. She had to keep pace with him, slowly, and it didn't do much to console her buzzing anxiety-riddled insides. She'd been restless all week, and it had hit its nauseating pique.

Oddly, she wanted to run to him- get it over with. Face it head on; panic afterwards. She tried to simply focus on her breathing instead of the obnoxious clacking of the walking cane. If she thought too hard about it all, she was sure that she would be sick.

"Don't tell him anything personal," There it was again, the talking *at* her: "Don't hand him anything that hasn't already been inspected and agreed upon; don't let him touch you in any way." He'd rehearsed it, but no one had been to visit Hannibal until then. They passed by an office that said *Doctor Alana Bloom* on it and Clarice would've loved to see inside. Wondered if anyone was.

After all the reading and analysis she'd done on Lecter, seeing the names and the faces in person was like seeing behind the set of a play. And it felt like she didn't entirely belong there.

"Stay a few feet away from the wall at all times." He continued, carefully going down a couple of flights of stairs, "The room has surveillance feeds, and armed guards posted outside, so anything that does happen, we will know about. And don't show him anything emotional. Try to keep them in check." She could guess that he wouldn't have said that if she were a man, "Or they'll come down on you like vultures." *They?* "Remember that if he's being nice, it's coercive. You shouldn't let him manipulate you, as much as you whet his appetite."

She didn't know what to say to that, so she pretended to not hear it, "Thank you, sir."

"Oh, ask him how they surrendered at the exact same time. They never give me straight answers." Or any kind of answers, "Find that out from them- if you can find out anything at all."

"*They*, sir?"

"Oh yes. I don't expect him to give you any trouble. It's Lecter you're here for." It couldn't be who she-- "If you're unable to continue, just tell the orderlies to escort you out. But I don't think you're the type to give up easily." They came to the final door, and he waved to the orderly to press the button. It was clear he wouldn't be accompanying her across the threshold, "Good luck doesn't quite cut it."

She smiled, almost chuckled at the absurdity of what she was doing there. The metal of the building hummed, and her stomach wound itself tighter. Like a Gordian knot, "It should be fine." She didn't know if she was reassuring him, or herself, "Thank you, Doctor."

Two people stood waiting for her. Side-by-side, mirrored in their positions- one less robotic than the other somehow. Merely a few inches separating them. No wall stood between.

Upon seeing her, Hannibal Lecter smiled. She didn't smile back.

And Clarice stopped, less than a few feet away from the glass.

Chapter End Notes

Clarice! There she is! I love her.

I imagine her as Jodie Foster, honestly, but she could be played by anyone you like. The characterisation I've gone with isn't dissimilar to the books, and her mannerisms and the way she is about things is taken a lot from my best friend who's away studying policing (I miss her dearly- this is probably a way of showing it). So, she's a strong, take-no-shit, witty, stubborn kinda person. Determined and as self-sufficient as anything. Difficult. Brilliant.

And I can't wait for you to get to know her.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

I am the key to the lock in your house
That keeps your toys in the basement
And if you get too far inside
You'll only see my reflection.
-Radiohead, *Climbing Up the Walls*

Clarice meets Will and Hannibal. Introductions aren't always that friendly.

Chapter Notes

Buckle up.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Do they still make referrals to me, then?" Hannibal greeted, statuesque. Will got tired of standing, and skulked around the back of him like some kind of animal, watching her, hands hidden in his pockets.

"It seems like they already have, sir." Will perked up, stopped. Hannibal smiled wider. The anxiety made her snippy.

"Who are you?" He asked, a slight diffidence to it, "I rarely forget a face."

"My name is Clarice Starling, Doctor Lecter. I was present at your arrest." Something changed in his eyes. She looked away. Will carried on to circle around the desk behind them, considered a book from the shelf, "May I speak with you?"

"Are you a fledgling, Agent Starling?" Hannibal kept snatching her attention away from Will.

"I suppose so, sir."

"How long have you been in your job?"

"Twelve months."

"Happy birthday." Will muttered, glancing up at her only once.

Seeing the distant look in his eyes, Clarice found him to not offer the reprieve she'd hoped for. Despite all her knowledge of him, all the articles and reports, all the dogs, she didn't know him at all.

She finally looked Hannibal in the face; tried and failed to relax the tension in her shoulders. All those mugshots, dead-eyed photos of a monster, were suddenly gone from her mind. There he was in the flesh, staring at her- hands tucked behind his back like a gun.

His smile had waned, "So, why did they choose you for it?"

"For what, sir?"

"What brought you here." *Threw a stone? Mental health failure? Short straw?*

"Maybe I chose the assignment."

"Or maybe Jack Crawford doesn't trust you with anything else." Will countered. He saw the brave spark in her eyes run into darkness, like fireflies rushing into a cave. She wanted to step backwards, but stood firm.

"I'm here about the Buffalo Bill case."

"Insulting us by stating the obvious isn't likely to help." Will said, settling into Hannibal's bunk in the far corner, a novel needless in his hand, "Why come here?"

"For insight. Mainly yours, Doctor." Clarice looked at the floor, as if addressing a superior, providing undue respect. Hannibal didn't take his eyes off of her, but she could sense his attention wasn't hers alone: "They didn't tell me you were here, Mister Graham."

Will resisted the want to scoff, "You didn't come here by yourself."

"That's correct, sir." She affirmed, "That was Agent Crawford's decision."

He sighed, didn't open his book. Briefly watching the emotion blip across his face in the small tics they did, Clarice could've easily forgotten about Hannibal's presence, if she wasn't so afraid.

"It's Will. Not *sir*." He told her, stared at the floor just next Hannibal's foot. He sighed again: "It's Promethean. The same story, on repeat. Only Prometheus can shape-shift."

"What do you mean, s-- Will?"

Hannibal inclined his head to her, admiring how startled her expression was, how she tensed under his gaze, just enough to be noticed: "Miriam Lass, Will Graham. *You*." He intoned darkly. Those names hung in the air like the ring of a shot. He was still stood between her and Will; the glass of the cell easy to forget, "You're tied to the rock now, Agent Starling."

Clarice squared her jaw, and refused to give ground, "Who's going to peck out my liver, Doctor? You?"

It appeared that he was charmed by her boldness: "They've provided a seat for you, I'm told. I suggest you take it."

The tension was mildly broken as she shouldered her bag and collected the fold-up chair. The snap of it being arranged, then she sat down, crossed her legs. As she did so, Hannibal, as if on cue, returned to his seat at his desk, residing there proudly.

Will seemed to return to the subject as he asked, "Skin is a strange keepsake to take, isn't it? What do you think he does with it?"

"Are you asking me if he eats it?"

"No. I'm asking you if you think he keeps it as a trinket, or puts it on display? Sews it into a blanket?"

"It's not off the table for him to ingest them in some way, but it seems too specific of a wound to be used in such a quick fashion."

"Fashion." He mimicked, instantly spotting the Virginian accent she tried so desperately to quell. She was robbed of her voice for a moment.

"Cannibalism is what you do best," She bit back, then regretted it, altered her posture, "If you're worried about competition."

Will studied her, intensely, "Does that disturb you?" She assumed it to be a rhetorical question, so he rephrased: "Is that why you're so nervous?"

She looked back at Hannibal, and his eyes flicked up and latched on to hers. Her heart stuttered. She took a breath. Blinked, "I wouldn't consider the act of eating human flesh to be palatable, no."

Will smiled, sudden and finally, and he looked completely normal. Clarice started. He huffed a laugh, shrugging, "It grows on you."

Clarice wondered if they only saw the hamstrings in her legs. If Hannibal had already portioned her with his eyes, like a flayed cow for a butcher.

"Are you asking for my help? Or are you demanding it?" Hannibal questioned, abruptly, poised with a pencil in his hand. She looked between them both, and starkly remembered there was a wall protecting her from them. But no wall between them. That seemed wrong. Could it be that--

"You were housed together as a prerequisite to our meeting, weren't you?" He didn't answer, but she knew.

Good behaviour didn't cut it. The promise of no more attacks on staff and lawsuits and agreeing to therapy wasn't enough. But an opportunity for them to chat with the FBI, recorded and all, and Chilton had melted into butter. *Anything* for a good bit of gossip.

And, FBI case be damned, if they didn't give *him* something he could work with, they'd never see each other again.

She became aware of the camera on her, cleared her throat, "I don't think you're in any position to make demands, Doctor, if that's what you're implying."

"But I am in the position to refuse yours, Clarice."

She immediately wanted to change her name. She wanted to shed her skin. His eyes and words struck her deeply. Every time. And she felt scared, like a scared little child. All over again.

But, maybe, maybe not. They'd both probably given enough insight to write a trilogy, if it was rinsed for all it was worth. She guessed that would be a given.

She didn't know *what* she'd gotten herself into: "I'll see what I can do." She said, unsure, "They certainly won't allow referrals. Or lax security." She rolled over, "I'm not sure *I* have much to offer, Doctor."

"As I'm aware." He put his pencil down, and folded his hands over his desk as he would in therapy. All at once rendered inoffensive, and curious: "For now, I will only ask for honesty."

Chapter End Notes

What does that mean? Is Clarice going to be okay? Do they have a plan to escape? Does Will have no morals, or is he being manipulative? Did he partake in all those crimes? How's Jack doing? What's this all leading up to? Wait, why did they get caught in the first place??????

I'm working out the kinks, but all questions will be answered in due time. Don't even worry.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

All water has perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.
-Toni Morrison

Clarice gets the help she wants from them. Or so she thinks.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Honesty, Doctor?"

"It shouldn't be too much to ask. If it is honesty you want in return," He noted, getting up from his desk, "Give me the case file, and I'd be happy to look at it for you." Clarice tried not to noticeably hesitate as she slipped the file from her satchel, and went to where Hannibal was patiently waiting at the slot. The closer she moved, the thinner the air felt. Hannibal's nostrils flared minutely. The clang as she pushed the drawer through nearly made her jump, "Thank you."

She felt wrong to turn her back on him, but was happy to get back to her seat, and regain composure. She didn't wait for silence: "Two victims were found four months apart, in two separate states. Fibre signatures on the blouses were as good as fingerprints- showed how he slit them up the back, like a funeral suit." Hannibal opened the Manila folder on his desk, and rearranged the crime scene photos with the tips of his fingers, scanning, "The recent lab studies are in there. Histamine analysis. Bullet slugs. They were all found nude; all in rivers. Local fishermen in West Virginia found a floater three days ago. She'd been in the water a week."

"What does he do to them?" Hannibal asked hollowly, absorbed.

"He shoots them dead, then their torsos are--"

"Before that." She didn't know what *before* meant.

"He keeps them alive for three days." She told him, keeping in time: "Keeps them fed just enough and cleaned well, until he kills them."

Hannibal seemed dissatisfied with the answer, his chest moving as if he'd sighed. Will didn't even look towards the table, but he'd given up feigning interest in his book, left tucked beside the pillow.

"All trace evidence is washed downstream. No prints, no sign of abuse, no fluids: no DNA." She told Hannibal, watching the way he was taking it in, flicking through the handwritten reports with one deft hand. The eerie stillness of expression.

"He's illusive, I'll give you that." Will chimed in, lounging back on the bed, against the far wall.

"Shy?"

"Don't mistake shyness for lack of ambition." Hannibal amended, "How many have there been?"

"We don't know. We predict five so far." Will nodded considerably from his back corner, mulling it over. Hannibal didn't change, spare taking his hands away.

"Are all the victims female?" He stopped on a photo of a swollen body, beached, face down on a pebbly riverbed and being warmed by the sun. The bloated skin was veined and rubbery: "All on the heavy side? *Roomy?*"

"They have similar body types, yes. The heights and weights are around the same." Clarice informed, wondering what exactly he was so transfixed.

"He has a type," Will quipped, "Like you?"

Hannibal pointedly ignored him, finally looking back up at Clarice: "Why do they call him Buffalo Bill? The papers won't say."

"I could tell you that."

"What is it, Clarice?"

Her throat clicked as she swallowed, "He skins them, sir."

Will rested his head back, eyes tired: "Bingo."

"*This one likes to skin his humps*, credit of Kansas City Homicide." She spotted Will's initial scowl upon hearing it, unimpressed. Hannibal, surprisingly, didn't smile.

"Why?"

"Doctor?"

"Why do you think he does it?"

This was a test she didn't want to fail, but it seemed fruitless with Will Graham in the room: "Cheap thrill, sir? It could excite him." She shrugged a little, "*Different strokes for different folks.*" That made him smile. It was unclear whether it was at her expense.

"Do you think he's sexually motivated?"

"I don't know. I would say he keeps to himself to avoid detection, and that could lead to isolation." Will was watching her closely when Hannibal wasn't, "Nothing makes us more vulnerable than loneliness, except greed."

"Is fulfilling an appetite an act of greed, Agent Starling?"

"It is when that appetite is the murder of young women, sir." She said, blankly: "I think that covers a multitude of sins."

He was smiling again, taking no offence, "Is he your average serial killer? Is this surgery greedy, or something else?"

"I don't know." She admitted, "Killers often keep trophies."

"I didn't."

"No. You ate yours." Will grinned from the corner, almost laughed: "Both of you did."

Will looked at her in the face, amused, like an orca is amused by a seal: "You're quick." He nodded, "That's *good*." Clarice shifted in her seat, pushed her hair back from her face. She could tell Will wasn't as monstrous as his counterpart, but he did well in unnerving her.

Hannibal had gone back to the file, and looked up as he said, "It doesn't make sense with his little nickname, but I think he's a fledgling too, Clarice."

It seemed he liked her name. She wouldn't deign to use his. If you name things, you get attached: "He's very sure for a beginner, Doctor."

"That he is."

"He's giving it a lot of effort. Working towards a goal, willing to go to extremes. Putting himself at risk to make a name for himself." Will mused, leaning forward to sit up, meeting her eyes properly, "Where else does that ring true, I wonder?"

"Takes one to know one?" Clarice offered, harmlessly, but Will was suddenly gone, cold and dead behind the eyes, before he averted them. She could've flinched.

"I think he knows what he's doing," Hannibal stated, staying on subject, "He has plans."

"There's no pattern to the killings."

Will seemed to agree with her, "It's *desperately* random. Almost-- frenzied."

"He's had to build up to this." Hannibal made no move to tidy up the file to give it back, "You should look into severe childhood disturbances. Violent tendencies. Our Billy wasn't born a criminal; it was abuse. Systematic, even." If Clarice had heard Will interpret a crime scene, she would've recognised the speech patterns, and how much they'd imprinted on one another, "He doesn't know what he is yet, or how he came about. At the moment, he's far more scared of you than you are of him."

"Does he care about that? Does he care about his victims?"

Will frowned, "You'd have to ask him."

"Did you care about yours?"

Clarice saw the hit land: "You're not here to discuss me."

"I digress." She said, apologetic. He really wasn't too monstrous. Or that's what he wanted her to think, "What made him begin, do you suppose?"

"It took time. He waited to cultivate his desires." He reasoned, addressing her like he would a crowd, "He needed to put a buffer before himself and the real world, to know of the consequences and the pain, but then learn how to inflict it." It seemed like an apt description for both Bill, and the man he shared a cell with. That was probably intentional, "After his first, I believe he found it."

Chapter End Notes

Should probably mention that there are big hints towards the Buffalo Bill reveal- and what Hannibal and Will's story is- throughout. Fun stuff.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

He looked to her like an absurd twentieth-century Hamlet, an indecisive figure so mesmerised by onrushing tragedy, that he was helpless to divert it's course, or alter it in any way.

-Stephen King, *The Shining*

The aftermath with Jack and Chilton leaves Clarice even more frustrated than the consult itself. She goes back for the second time. Will is all by himself, waiting for her.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hannibal was back to his drawing before Clarice was escorted out of the room. They'd let him keep the case file to study, and he didn't look up from it- writing notes and correcting reports, sat up straight, with the only blunted pencil they would allow in hand.

Will watched her leave, back to them, saw her as she glanced back round to the room whilst leaving. Her eyes were flighty. She would probably throw up in the women's bathroom before she left. He wouldn't blame her. He sighed when the doors closed.

At the end of the corridor, Chilton stood waiting just outside the guard post. The security camera feeds stuttered and fizzed inside: "Maybe you have a *knack* for this. I suppose we'll find out. If you last very long."

Clarice didn't stop walking to talk to him, "You *knew*. You knew from the start, but you weren't up front with me. You sent me in to them naked."

"I gave you enough warning." Chilton dismissed, following behind her as well as he could: "Perhaps three would be a crowd had you known--"

"If I had known I was being tricked into working with *two* psychopaths, I would've never stepped foot in your *fucking* hospital." She snapped, not really meaning it. The suddenness of own outburst stopped her in her tracks, sighing, "You'll have to forgive me, sir. You're more experienced with dealing with them than I am. I wasn't prepared for the both of them." A bolster to his ego didn't go amiss, but it still kept him viperous.

"Yes, well. *I* would have never let you step foot in my hospital, had I known the ease with which you are broken." He said, curt and foul.

"I'm not broken." She levelled, scoffed, both irrefutably stubborn. Chilton was struck. His jaw twitched.

"Not quite."

She slowed her pace as he continued on, wanted to rub her eyes as if to wake up from an awful dream. Her stomach was coming undone in nasty waves of relief and sickness. She considered throwing away the lunch in her bag Ardelia had made her: "How do you know that Lecter's not playing with you?"

Chilton eased up a little. Mainly because of his leg seizing up from trying to rush off. He rarely cut people some slack, but he could identify with how rattled she had been left.

"Lying and breathing are the same thing to Hannibal Lecter." He gave her, *nearly* amiable, anything to show his intelligence, "He might not know a thing, yet he has all of us like spinning plates, waiting for his next move."

They went through another buzzing clanky door, back up to Chilton's office, with the waiting Jack Crawford. He'd heard and watched it all at the desk, the tablet off to his side, hands together in front of him. His eyes were hard. Not even Chilton made a snide comment.

"A lot of things in there, I don't think I should have heard, Starling." Jack warned.

"Agent Crawford, I--"

"You were told about provoking them- you've had plenty of training. That *shouldn't* have been too hard for you." His glare was so harsh and fatherly Clarice didn't want to look him in his face, "Can you adhere to instruction, Agent Starling?"

"I can, sir."

"So why didn't you?" She didn't know how to speak. One wrong word and that was it.

"He's already agreed to help." She uttered, careful, "If you think there's a connection, why can't I simply ask him for Bill?"

"He agreed to help; not to snitch." Jack corrected, "*Maybe* there is a connection. His consult will help, but only if he's willing." He reconsidered, "If it keeps him amused."

"Amused, sir?"

"Hannibal finds this *fun*. It's all that's left for him. In his eyes, it's blood sport." He affirmed, rising from the seat and picking up his coat to leave. Jack was cold to Clarice as he shook Chilton's hand, thanked him. She awaited his verdict and filed out just behind him as they moved through the building, thankfully not venturing further inside. She didn't expect him to talk when he did: "You can't let him think you're enjoying yourself just as much. You can't feel close to him. He only feeds on pain."

Clarice picked up on the begrudging weariness to that last bit. And the fact he was entirely avoiding the subject of Will, just as he had beforehand.

"I think he means it." She tried, determined, "They wouldn't risk being separated again. Surely if--"

"If we act too anxious, he will make us wait. He'll make us wait until another washes up." He sighed slightly, "He'd think about it as the most fun he's had in a while."

They approached the entrance of the building, fresh air- a welcome relief- coaxing them out. Clarice didn't want to leave anything answerless, not when he was actually talking to her: "Sir. What about Will Graham?"

Jack met her eyes, firm, "What about Will Graham? He has no good reason to help anymore." He certainly didn't like to hear that name, "And, despite how it seems, I didn't send you in there for him." She didn't buy it- he probably hoped a fresh face would help remind him of his past. As if it would change something. Not getting in the car, he turned to her, "You stay right behind your eyes today, Starling. You think about him long enough you get a feel for him, and some part of you has to tug that out. I can't be the one to do that for you." He said, stronger than he felt, "You can't let him inside your head. Understand?"

"Yessir."

She didn't know if it was solely Hannibal he was referring to.

"You look tired, Agent Starling." Will greeted, alone in the cell, and looked up at her from his place at the desk. Whenever he said her name it seemed comradely. Hannibal used it like a weapon. Clarice sighed, placing her bag down to grab the folding chair with her free hand, coffee in the other: "Are the corpses keeping you awake at night?"

She sat down, and nodded hesitantly, feeling even more tired because of Hannibal's absence. Not that she wasn't still being kept on her toes, "I haven't seen any of the corpses in person. Only in photos."

"Does that bother you?" He seemed to be filling in half-completed noughts and crosses.

She didn't exactly know if it did. Maybe it made things a little less real to her. She doubted it would benefit her either way; they still found their way into her sleep, like parasites burrowing under her scalp.

"No." She finally answered, drinking the last bit of her coffee which tasted like burnt ash and soil, "I don't think so."

Will studied her, sympathetic, "How do you feel?"

What a loaded question.

"Like there are mothballs in my brain cavity." She joked, bitterly, the tendrils of threadbare sleep still peeling off of her, "I think I can feel them behind my eyes when I close them."

Will understood that feeling all too well, "Sleep with the light on. Should coax them out."

She didn't know if she should feel put at ease by his kindness, but she was. He was more abrasive than Hannibal, but they both had a strange capacity for kindness. Clarice didn't want to think about it, in case of falling into the trap of humanising them.

"Where's Doctor Lecter?"

"Examination room. Light therapy." He smiled conspiratorially, "The irony."

"Does it work?"

"What do you think?"

She didn't see Chilton on her way in, and was let through by an orderly after inspection. What went on in their therapy sessions Clarice could only imagine.

"Do you know when he'll be back?"

"Not within the hour." He was scribbling his scruffy handwriting under calligraphy, "Longer than that, if he decides to-- y'know." He didn't have to make a gesture to get his point across. Clarice had seen the dog-eared photos of a nurse's face, tongue torn out, burst eye hanging off, like she'd been chewed up by a wild animal. Perhaps she had, in a way.

"Unfortunately, I do." She huffed, sipped her drink. Will was distracted. She supposed there was no harm in asking: "Are you willing to help?" He raised his eyebrows, "Need more corpses to keep you awake at night?"

He gave a small, disarming smile, "One more couldn't hurt?"

"Doctor Lecter said he's using these acts as a buffer? What did he mean by that?"

"Many things, probably. He would've had to have a warm-up. Practice to ease into it. Some kill animals, some dream about it, some plan it all out." She wanted to know what he did.

"Do you agree with that?"

He seemed unconvinced, "Perhaps."

"Why would he need to do it?"

"Cushioning."

"I'm sorry?"

"Cushioning. Security. Some of us are sensitive that way." The collective *us* either referred to all of humanity, or murderers.

"So, you believe he's emotional? Enough to feel something towards his victims."

"All killers feel something." He mused, looking pensively at the closed file on the table, "He's too sensitive in the treatment of the bodies, and infliction of the wounds, to not have *some* semblance of understanding."

"Why does he need to be sensitive?"

"Maybe he likes who he kills." That was a bewildering idea, "He believes they hold a purpose."

"What purpose is that?"

"I don't know. Something that means he doesn't want to mess them up too badly, whatever purpose that is."

"Are you saying he's scared?" He looked up at her, "What is he scared of?"

"I'm not sure."

He was being short with her. If he didn't know more than he was letting on, he either hadn't thought much about it, or had misplaced everything the FBI had once praised him for. It couldn't be the latter. She looked down at her papers for a moment to collect her thoughts, and met his eyes again evenly.

"Hazard a guess?"

"A police shootout, maybe?" He mocked, dull, "Prison time?"

"Am I wasting my time here, Will?"

He considered his response, "You have read the case file, haven't you? Everything you need to know is in there."

"And why can't one son of a bitch around here give me a straight answer about it?"

He seemed pleasantly surprised by her bluntness. It wasn't often he heard something being said that wasn't embellished or unnecessarily cryptic, "That's your job, Agent Starling." He reminded her, "Just don't do what I did."

She turned on him, "Marry a serial killer? Kill people?"

There was a weighted pause.

Then, without anger, he simply said: "Don't think you can save everyone."

Chapter End Notes

Shout out to Ardelia for making Clarice lunch.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

I don't say we all ought to misbehave, but we ought to look as if we could.
-Orson Welles

Glimpse into a domestic conversation between Hannibal and Will. Rules are made to be broken. Someone is there to visit Will, and ruins all the fun.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Do you think they ever worry about us trying to kill each other again?" Will pondered, watching the lens of the security camera. He'd evidently gotten tired of the game of hangman Hannibal had tasked him with. He was down to his last two limbs, and he had only got one vowel.

_ U _ _

It seemed to be proving impossible.

Hannibal was lying ramrod straight on his bed, feet crossed at the ankle and hands folded over his chest, "In here, or out there?"

It was entertaining to think that whoever was listening would be alarmed by that.

Will shrugged one-sidedly, "Doesn't matter."

"I would think so. But they'd probably see such an incident- if it was successful- as the relief of a burden."

"One of us would survive it. Probably." He mused, twirling the pencil between his fingers, and testing the point of the end against the pad of his thumb, "Who do you think would win?"

Hannibal sighed, his voice a low mumble, "I would undoubtedly let you kill me." Moonlight and blood came to mind, "I've committed to the idea plenty of times already."

"That's a forfeit." Will said, thoughtful, but clearly not pleased with the answer, "I'd feel better about it if you at least let me *feel* like I could do it. Without your pity."

"You have every chance of surprising me, Will."

"Don't patronise me. This is serious."

"I don't have many defences up around you. In a fair fight, I doubt you'd be victorious, but fairness doesn't count if I willingly submit. And I would." He narrowly opened his eyes, feigning suspicion, "In fact, you'd be the best person for the job."

Will quirked a skeptical brow, "I think the no touching rule would eradicate that chance in here."

"Oh, of course," Hannibal closed his eyes, playing along, "Mustn't disturb the peace."

"Of course." He smiled a little, because he couldn't help himself, and started picking the stuff out from under his nails with the tip of the pencil. Which he knew Hannibal hated him doing. He presumed he wasn't looking: "Besides. I can't exactly paper-cut you to death, either. Or can I?"

"No. But your hands are very capable, Will."

When that wasn't met with an answer, Hannibal opened his eyes to find Will giving him a flat look of reproach, "Don't *flirt* with me. Or I'll break the no touching rule." He smiled at that.

Fluidly, Hannibal got up, came over to the desk, and plucked his pencil out of Will's hand. He tidied up the various papers and drawings that were askew. Will watched him, put on foot up on the table to rock his chair back, like he did at school as a boy. Admired his hands. Thought about them on him, in vastly different contexts. Kept an eye on the pencil: "Do you worry, then?" Hannibal asked, conversationally, "About me trying to kill you?"

"Should I?"

"Do you have to ask?"

Will got pointed, suddenly aware of the room they were in, "It's not exactly unheeded."

"Then no, you don't."

"...Unless."

"Unless?"

Will blinked at him, "With you, there's always a catch."

Almost imperceptibly, Hannibal glanced at Will's foot on the table. Will's look hardened. Holding his gaze, Will crossed his feet onto the desk. Challenged. Hannibal fixed what he was doing, and looked at him with the same lazy indifference as that of an unimpressed teacher. Will waited expectantly.

And he was rewarded. A hand on his neck, but instead of a grip it was a hold. Then a kiss. It felt like a punch- he closed his eyes to it, and they kissed once, hard, as they hadn't in months, too long, all that wasted time- and as the metal waned and the door creaked open, Will stood up as the kiss ended. Not out of being caught, in fact, he didn't look at Frederick, he'd followed Hannibal's mouth up and away, they stood, not touching, just looking. It looked

as if they'd butt heads, in the intimate way lions do, or bite or kiss or kill one another. Such heat between them.

But as soon as it had happened, it was gone. Because it had to be. They exchanged words that the security feed didn't pick up. Will could've caught on fire.

"May I remind you of--"

"What are you going to do?" Will snapped, hands up, "Arrest me?"

That silenced him. Chilton could let that slide for now.

"Why are you here, Frederick?" Hannibal enquired, Will moving away to his bunk.

"There's someone to see you. *Mister Graham*." He turned back to him, scowling. If someone knew where to visit him, they would have to be told.

"Why can't they come in here?"

He glanced at Hannibal tightly, too irritable to be mean or funny, "They'd prefer the privacy."

Names ran through his head. It couldn't have been Clarice, considering it was Hannibal she really wanted to talk to.

For a short, ugly moment, he feared it would be a certain someone he would rather forget.

They took him from the cell with no expense spared: straitjacket tight, ankles strapped together, mounted onto a standing wheelchair to be transported out. They omitted the mask, considering he hadn't taken a bite out of anyone- not in the physical sense, anyway.

Hannibal watched the display with a smile, stood at the back of the cell, watched diligently by two guards with tasers, batons, and mace at their disposal. It seemed he found the whole thing quite exciting.

Will was wheeled down the hall, out past the inmates that were behind bars and metal doors. Some screamed- those that saw him came up and held the bars like caged monkeys, or walked the length of their cell as if following along. Daylight slithered in from a window, and as they approached the privacy room, they slowed.

Through the glass, Will saw a head of hair. Curly. Ginger.

Will forced out a sigh as she entered, his legs being unclipped, pushed off the wheelchair, then they yanked the buckles of the jacket, loosening it. As soon as it was taken off of him, his wrist being held in order to be cuffed to the table, he moved. Freddie jumped up, he cleared the table and slammed her back against the wall by her throat, squeezed until veins came out in her neck and forehead, face redder, purple, her eyes frightened and blown wide, he wanted to tear tongue out until she had too much blood in her mouth to swallow, until she coughed and choked and *begged*, break her skull open against the brick.

In reality, the orderlies knocked the door open. They wheeled him in, and Will didn't look at her until he was calm enough. He stared out the warped glass of the window, and desperately wanted to smell the wind, feel the breeze on his face.

They left his straitjacket, put a chain around his waist equipped with cuffs that they clipped to the chair they sat him on. He exhaled, and faced her down. She was seemingly undaunted.

"Hello, Mister Graham." She greeted, chipper, "Or is it... *Graham-Lecter*?"

Chapter End Notes

Good question, Freddie.

Also, that hangman thing is a Buffalo Bill reference.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true.

-Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

Will has an interview with Freddie Lounds. She asks some difficult questions. Will is hard to read, and he's angry.

Chapter Notes

Freddie Lounds and I have a love-hate relationship. But she fucked Will over pretty good, and he is going to do the same right back. It's all a matter of time.

(Take the threats he makes with a pinch of salt, he loves to scare Freddie.) (And they're one of his defence mechanisms, along with wit, nonchalance, and avoidance.) (Don't tell him I told you.) (But that isn't to say he wouldn't kill her given the chance.) (For real.) (It's all a matter of time.)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will didn't take the bait. But, deciding against their initial plan, one of the orderlies went to begin unbuckling the straitjacket.

"Don't." Will warned, not taking his eyes off of Freddie.

Not a threat. An insurance.

There was a stiff pause of just looking. Then, derisively, the strap was tightened as it was adjusted. Will watched Freddie's eyes flitting, showing how she really felt. The door buzzed and locked as they filed out, leaving them pitted against one another. They had an hour all to themselves.

It wasn't until they were alone that she seemed to gather her wits: "You don't seem pleased to see me."

The obvious contempt in his eyes was masked by a translucent veil, like oil slick on a lake's surface: "You could say that."

It was bizarre to see her struck dumb, even if it was only for a fleeting moment. She knew why he was angry, but she hadn't known it's intensity- and had promptly realised that her rehearsed excuses and answers and ideas of how the conversation would be played out, just wouldn't cut it. That was scarier than the prospect of violence.

"*Look.* They said you were dead, and I--"

"God may forgive you, but I don't." Will interrupted, unwavering. Freddie's expression fluttered like a manic bluejay, and she didn't know what to do with her hands but fold them on the table in front of her. He'd hardly seen her so sheepish, or, at a loss. It was out of character. That was good.

She seemed to fall on honesty: "I don't apologise often, but I would want to--"

"Apologies become redundant when they don't beget change. I don't want to hear it." He told her, frankly, eyes fixed on the window. He wanted to go fishing.

In her discomfort, Freddie could still claim confidence. But she could tell he was being avoidant to spite her: "Why did you agree to talk with me?"

Will attempted to move his shoulders under his restraints, the chains tinkling, and sighed, "I'm feeling-" He mused, "*Indulgent.*"

Freddie read him, partly, sat back in her seat. This would be a difficult interview, but they were in it now: "I don't know whether to be flattered."

"Don't be."

Wasting no time, she got her little recording device out of her bag, placed it on the table between them. Will found himself surprised that it wasn't already running. But then, not that surprised, considering she could've had multiple- and it wasn't as if her stories often ran on a lot of undeniably credible, and legal, evidence. Same old Freddie Lounds.

"I think you know why I'm here."

"I can take a wild guess."

"I assume you also know about Jack Crawford sending his newest pet to track down killers?"

Straight to the point. *Newest pet.* Will wanted to sigh, "Yes." He bit out.

"You're allowed to read the papers in here." She was catlike, but lacked all the subtlety, "What can you tell me about her? Agent Starling, I mean."

Will inclined his head, realising, "She won't talk to you." The thought made him smile internally, imagining how Clarice would undoubtedly stonewall her, hold her tongue at her questions. Shut doors in her face. Wouldn't surprise him if she'd turned around and told her exactly where she can stick her proposition of an article. *Attagirl.*

"What can I say," Freddie consoled, "Some people aren't as easily won over by my charm."

"You're a manipulator and a liar who writes hateful articles for money."

"That's journalism. Welcome to the real world."

"I'm sure the Bimmel family wouldn't say so, with all those implications you made." He countered, unimpressed, "Playground. Like, crude whispers behind the bleachers at school. Is that where you got your information?"

She smiled falsely, "So, you've read my articles?"

"Not personally."

Her eyebrows ticked up, "Of course you haven't. How *is* Hannibal?"

Will pretended he didn't hear that: "You came here to ask me about Buffalo Bill. You're not asking the right questions."

"I came here, Mister Graham, to ask you about *you*." She said, sweetly, like it was an act of kindness. It would be an insult to her intelligence if she really thought that would work out. She was too smart for that.

"That's not happening."

"Alright then." She breezed, pretending to change gears, "Why is he skinning them? It shows surgical knowhow, but no one's quite sure of what he does with it." She tried to ply him when he didn't seem to register the question, "Some people think skin grafts. I even heard leather bags."

Will almost rolled his eyes: "*Something's* compelling him to do it."

"What's that?"

"I don't know." Will offered, indifferently, "Obsessions are used by damaged people. To damage themselves even more."

Freddie turned that over and over in her head. She didn't see it. It couldn't be the kind of thing that the FBI found so insightful, "I think we both know you can give me more than that."

"I don't see what's in it for me."

Now they're talking: "I can get you things- privileges. I'm sure I could pull some strings. What is it that you want?" Then she noted, "Within reason."

Will thought about it at length. She was happy that he didn't just bite her head off for suggesting it, "Find out what happened... to our dogs."

"Dogs? What dogs?"

"The ones we had when they caught us." For a second she thought he meant-- "I want to know where they are now."

He'd rather know where his dogs are, than the ex-wife and child he left behind for a cannibalistic serial killer.

Perhaps not the best way to put it. Freddie was on two sides about it. She didn't really know whether he had *left her* for Hannibal, or that it was where he'd really been all along.

"Okay." She agreed, with no plan on how to achieve it, "What can you tell me about him that you haven't said?"

"Ask away. I'm all yours."

"Do you engage with the consultations with Agent Starling?"

Will didn't like that connotation, "Yes."

"But I hear you're being a nuisance. With all those-- what would you call them? Tantrums? But even after settling down, you're not proving helpful to the FBI. Not like you used to be-- not like Hannibal is, in his own little way." He could've spat at her, "No longer concerned with saving lives?" It seemed whenever she really provoked him, he went quiet. She wanted to break that tradition. She aimed low: "No longer concerned with the family you left behind?"

His eyes snapped to her. There it was. The anger. She was finally getting somewhere, "Mention her name and your next words will be screams."

"I seem to have touched a nerve." She feigned sympathy beautifully, "How about we forget the dogs, and, as long as you cooperate, I won't go and talk to your wife? *Ex-wife*."

Oh fuck.

"You wouldn't."

"I *would*." Underestimating her could prove fatal. Nothing was off-limits, not even crime scenes. He'd be a fool to think otherwise.

"I can't *trust* you."

"What choice do you have?" For the sake of human decency and his own, not much. Even after everything he'd done, he wouldn't want to cause more hurt. Not to her. She never deserved that.

"Fine."

"Good." She smiled, "I'll ask again. Why is he skinning them?"

Will sighed, "It's not about the girls. He doesn't care about them."

"With all that he does to them?"

"It's objectification." He stated, "I would've thought that was obvious."

"What does he care about? What is he trying to achieve?"

Will considered how to put it: "He selects them carefully. He cares about what he wants from them, and once he has that, he disposes of them. He doesn't care if they're discovered, because he might want them to be found. Not in a gloating way; he doesn't realise they matter." Freddie was taking notes. Will watched her eat it up, ready to spit it back out to the public, "He has some kind of interest in them as humans, but he ultimately treats them as you would a band-aid, or a sweet wrapper."

"How?"

He scowled, "Easily discarded once their purpose is fulfilled." A beat, "Isn't that what you do to people, Freddie?"

She glared at him.

"I care about young girls dying, Will."

"Not where Abigail is concerned."

That stopped her dead. Her heart leapt to her neck like a chokehold, "I still care about her. She would've wanted the truth to be out when she wouldn't be around to face its--"

"Don't act like it was for her. Nothing you do is selfless."

"I did it because you--"

"You gave me your word and you lied, Freddie." He pointed out, almost offhandedly with how relaxed he was being, with an edge to his voice like a blade, "Her memory was the only thing left. And you shattered it."

The ending of a threat didn't come out verbally, but from the look in his eyes, Freddie could see a clock.

Counting down.

A pit of nerves converged in her stomach like a tumour, "Aren't you the forgive-and-forget type?" Will scoffed a laugh, but not a humorous one.

"I'm not the messiah, Freddie." He quipped, expression frighteningly closed. He leaned forward a little, his tone nothing but calm and polite as he said, "If it were up to me, you'd be picking up your broken teeth with broken fingers."

Freddie swallowed, and tried her best to hide her fear.

"You aren't exactly in the position to remedy that, Will."

He lurched forward a bit, and the chains smacked against the table. Freddie started.

"Lucky you."

She let that settle. Let her heartbeat return to normal. She made a last ditch effort to prize something out of him, "So. How should I refer to you in the article? Lecter-Graham? Graham-Lecter, is it?"

"Are you going to write a piece about Agent Starling and her '*inevitable fall from grace*'?" He asked, thoughtful.

"Do you think I should?"

"Let me guess. *Takes one to catch one*?"

Freddie cocked her head, sharp, "Takes one to *love* one." That silenced him, "So, who *is* Buffalo Bill?" She asked, impromptu, as if to catch him off-guard, "A friend of yours?"

"I don't keep pen pals."

"So you *do* know, then?"

"No comment."

"Where is he, then? What do you know that you can't say?"

"I'm not answering that."

"Then tell me how to find him."

"I'd sooner bash my head against this table than tell you, Freddie." He chuckled suddenly, a dark sound, "You know that."

She remained deceptively placid. Professional, even, "Are those the sort of violent tendencies the reason for your hospitalisation? Or rather, what comes of them?"

"All the blood rushing to my head would help with the comedy." He said flatly, unyielding.

She made a final rally: "How do we catch him?"

"That's not my problem." He whistled to an orderly outside the room, and they came in to get him. Interview over. Freddie was grasping at straws for things to say, but came up blank.

As they escorted her out, they had to move past the wheelchair that he was being strapped to. She braced for an impact. But he only looked at her icily, within touching distance, and said, "Send Jack Crawford my regards."

Chapter End Notes

"I'll get that interview!" Always believe in your dreams.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

She thought there were no Gods; no one was to blame; and so she evolved this atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness.

-Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Catherine Martin has been taken. They suspect Buffalo Bill is involved. Clarice has to go to see Hannibal, and is asked for personal information in exchange for help, that strikes her deeply.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Senator Ruth Martin's speech had been on all news outlets, and the coverage was replayed every day for a week. There was no breaking news after that, but her plea was aired out across other media too, and the tabloids rinsed it dry: slapping her and her daughters faces on any cover they could find; old white men converging on the radio stations to speculate the prospects for the girl's happy return (not likely, apparently); the public appeal had already created a tip line that was flooded with calls within the hour. She was everywhere.

Senator's Daughter Has Been Taken: What Now?

President Is 'Intensely Concerned' Over Catherine Martin Disappearance.

'Please, I Beg You, Release My Catherine': Senator Pleads For Her Child's Life.

Memphis police sources were spilling out information about the investigation before it had really begun, and the Senator herself made the dramatic personal plea for her daughter's life the night of her disappearance, that was broadcast cyclically. Like a kind of purgatorial nightmare. One member of the Tennessee public had shown concern about the possible links to the recent killings, and reporters took it and ran.

Catherine Martin was destined to be Buffalo Bill's next victim. She had upped the stakes. The papers devoured every rumour, and implication, and rude joke about the girl they could, and were already feasting on her, like carrion.

One of those papers, ended up in Hannibal postage, and was noticeably sat atop their kept case file when Clarice entered the room.

"You keep coming back," Will said as a way of greeting.

Clarice sat down in her foldout chair, and got out a little notebook from her utility belt. Her hair was up in a ponytail, stray hairs falling in her face, with a grey t-shirt tucked into her high-waisted belt, reading *FBI Academy*. Her skin slightly glossy, having come straight from the scene. Hannibal could smell wet grass, and cigarette smoke, and panicked sweat. It made her look washed-out but strong, which is exactly how she felt.

Will continued, studying her from his place cross-legged on top of the table, folding papers: "You're like a kicked dog, Agent Starling. Despite it all, you keep on coming back."

She was reminded of what he'd said about some killers starting out with imagination, or abuse: "You ever kick any of your dogs, Will?"

Will frowned, "Only by accident, and I felt terrible afterwards. Can't say the same for doing so to people."

"Do you make a habit out of kicking people?"

"Not much experience. I think we both know I've done a lot more than that, though, unfortunately." He was smiling a little. The paper he was folding seemed to be an attempt at origami, the scrunched-up balls that littered the floor and desk evidence of his first dozen.

"Unfortunately." Clarice conceded, wondering if it was more unfortunate for them or for him. Hannibal was sat in a chair, civilised, and was writing a letter. She didn't want to rush him. And talking to Will was actually a weirdly welcome relief, after the chaos of the scene, "I hope your sentiment is a kind one."

"Of course." Will answered, tepidly, "I admire your-- *commitment*. To the job, that is."

"Then I'll take it as a compliment."

"You do that. I know what it's like to be on the other side of the glass, and I wouldn't blame you for not coming back."

"But you did come back, Will." Hannibal noted, rising from his chair as he folded his letter, tucking it into its envelope, licking the seal. He signed it, glanced up at Will, "You came back to me."

"Yes. Not like I had much of a choice." Hannibal only then seemed to notice the mess, and sighed.

"You had every choice." He amended, correcting a fold line only to have his hands batted off, "But you chose to come to me."

Clarice may as well have not been in the room. It was oddly pleasant yet disconcerting to watch them interact, but she could see why Chilton kept such a close eye. They were like one person having a conversation with themselves.

Will shrugged, not looking up, "Probably the worst decision of my life."

"Probably." Hannibal smiled fondly at him, filing the letter amongst the outgoing as he moved to stand facing Clarice: "But I think being on the other side of the glass helps you, Agent Starling. In more ways than just physically."

And, she was back in the room: "What ways are those, Doctor?"

"You keep people at arm's length, Clarice. Why is that, I wonder?"

"Why do you think, sir?"

"I think that the perchance leans towards men. Why would that be?"

"I'm not interested in many men, I'm afraid."

Hannibal smiled, "But you go out of your way to distance yourself. It's more than disinterest. You dislike them." In that circumstance, given the two she had in front of her, she reckoned it justified. Really, as a woman, it was, "Do you fear men, Clarice?"

"I wouldn't say so, no." She shrugged one-sidedly, "I'm realising as I get older that the distance does little to help avoid pain."

"Is because you've suffered a significant loss in your life?" He saw right through her, "Mother?" No reaction, "Father?" She shifted in her seat. *Bingo*, "Idolisation, especially of a parental figure, lands distance between us and them. But leaves room for plenty of deluded thoughts of love." Clarice could feel herself being wound up, "But despite the disparities that were separating you both, his death hurt just the same, didn't it?"

He didn't know what he was talking about. She seethed under his gaze, jaw setting, eyes steady, "How do you resist the urge to kill him, Will?"

"That would break the no touching rule, what makes you think I'm a criminal?"

"Hostility is often a sigh of truth." Hannibal interrupted, snatching back her fiery attention.

"I don't like being probed, Doctor. I can only imagine what would happen if the roles were reversed." She saw his expression crack, just a bit, showing the sting, "That high-powered observation would be a nasty weapon to turn on yourself. Wouldn't it? What would you see?"

"What makes you think I haven't?"

"Cowardice." She said bluntly- she'd read his case file cover-to-cover more than once, she had glimpsed what made up his madness early on, she wasn't defenceless: "There are things you don't want to see."

"I'm capable of many things, Agent Starling." He said, darkly: "I'd be offended to find that you think self-reflection is beyond my understanding."

"Your self-reflection would be filtered through your ego." She wasn't fucking around today. He'd go as far as to say she sounded like Will: "That wouldn't be fair, Doctor."

"Is fairness a high priority to you?"

"It is. Especially when murder is involved. You and I have differing opinions on what that means to us, as I understand it."

"Do you believe that murder isn't fair on the victim? Or it isn't fair on you to deal with?"

He was trying to untangle her grief. She wasn't going to give him anything personal, not on top of the day she'd had, "It's in my job description to deal with serial killings and murders, Doctor Lecter, it would be shortsighted of me to feel sorry for myself. It was my choice."

Hannibal angled his head, "That isn't an answer to my question, Clarice."

Clarice sighed, "Death is never fair. It would be hypocritical for us all not to identify with that." Will had finished his origami. It was a open-winged bird. Or a... butterfly?

"Then tell me, in the name of fairness: does your stoicism ground the pain of your father's loss?" She took a deep breath, "Or hide it, even from yourself?"

"I don't see what this has got to do with the case, Doctor."

"Ah, but it has everything to do with it." He said, witty, "Quid pro quo. Something for something. It's what we agreed, Clarice."

She wanted to sigh again, hesitating, before surrendering, "Fine. I don't want to get too close to people. It probably stems from my father, yes."

"We're all orphans here, Clarice." Will looked away, "No need to feel ashamed."

"It's not about shame. Women have to deal with enough shame as it is. I don't understand why this is relevant."

Will picked up the tabloid from behind him, thumbed through it, "Do you think Billy's trauma has stemmed from his parents?" He asked, skim-reading, "Or from someone closer?"

"This is solely imbedded in childhood trauma?"

"All behaviour is, in some regard." Hannibal mused, glancing at Will.

"Is yours?"

"Yes." He said, no hesitation. No emotion. Clarice marvelled.

"I-- don't know." She admitted, gathering herself. The security camera whirred as it zoomed out, "Someone got under his skin, then?"

"Warmer." Will uttered, reading.

Her name is Catherine... you have the power to let her go... she's gentle and kind- talk to her; you'll see. The objectification he told Freddie about had been passed up the ranks, it seemed.

"Quite. And now he wants to get under the skin of poor Catherine Martin."

"The Senator's daughter." She said, seeing her face on the cover, "Yeah."

"She didn't send you here, did she?" The look on her face didn't say no, "Do you not think yourself an odd choice of messenger?"

Jack hadn't been sure of Lecter's help, and letting Clarice have even more exposure, but as soon as she was taken, the Senator spoke to him directly. She had wanted to go herself to meet him, but Jack refused. With little notice, Jack had told her at the scene of the suspected kidnapping, and told her where she would be going immediately. In some capacity, she felt tricked: "Perhaps. I'd prefer not to be shot down."

"What makes you say that?"

"You have the habit of making it feel that way, sir."

"And you have the habit of refusing to cooperate with our agreement." He retorted, snippy, "Do you hide your pain to avoid confrontation?"

Clarice didn't want to think about it. Didn't want to talk to him about it now, and not ever: "I don't *know*."

Hannibal seemed to change course, "Fear can stimulate actions to destroy any message that may cause harm. Internally, or externally. You react with diversion, aggression." He met her eyes, his own dark under the glaring lights, "Some can react with violence."

Chapter End Notes

GASP!

Also I don't know how many chapters this will have, but I've planned out the whole thing, so don't fret.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

To make a woman stay in a burning house; there must be something there. You don't stay for nothing.

-Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

Revelations are made. Hannibal pushes Clarice to reach her breaking point.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took a hot minute. I'll strive to post every other day like I have previously. Life just keeps getting in the way.

Clarice's notes had become more about Hannibal's behaviour than the case. She scribbled down his aversion towards answering the question, a reminder to ask it again later, "Are you saying he's refusing to confront himself? Are the killings not him doing that?"

"The killings are the act. What comes before is what matters."

"Then, what comes *before*, Doctor?"

She knew he would change the subject before he took his next breath. Was he becoming predictable?

"The Jungian theory of the shadow is the physical embodiment of our childhood traumas, and unconscious behavioural issues. It encompasses a belief that the less our innermost turmoils are consciously embodied, the darker and denser it becomes."

"Do you have a shadow, Doctor Lecter?"

"Do you?" He easily deflected, "I should think yours to be darker than anyone's in this room. Even more so than Billy's."

"You don't need to commit murder to deal with trauma, Doctor." She said, almost exasperated, "There are probably steps you can take before doing so."

"Don't knock it till you try it." Will advised, unmoving from his position on top of the table, still skimming through the paper.

It didn't come as a shock that he could focus on both the reading and the conversation being held. Another trick enhanced by Hannibal, it seemed. Clarice's glare wasn't met, but he knew exactly what he was doing by landing distance between them just as easily as taking it away. She couldn't much tell whose side he was on.

"Sorry to disappoint both of you," Clarice levelled, "But I'm not killing anyone."

Hannibal's mouth ticked up into a smile quicker than he could suppress it, "No." He agreed, "Not yet, you aren't."

She'd had enough. She stood as if to leave, but instead got prints of photos out of her back pocket and approached the tray. Hannibal didn't follow her there until she slid them across, "They printed photos of the newest scene to add to the files. I thought they'd be useful, if you decide to do some analysis."

"Thank you, Clarice." He picked them up and flicked through them on his way back to the desk. They were taken in the autopsy. She went back to her chair, crossed her legs when her foot started to shake nervously. She didn't like getting too close.

"What do you make of the injuries? Apart from the skinning?"

Hannibal placed them in a pile on the folder. Will didn't noticeably look at them, dropped down his paper and got off the desk to steal Hannibal's chair behind it. Distancing himself. For his part, Hannibal seemed appreciative.

He picked up the origami from the table, and it wasn't a bird. The curves were too round to be a butterfly.

"There are markings on the meatiest parts of the flesh." It made her feel ill when Hannibal put it like that, "Does he use needles?"

Surely he knew the answer to that, if he read the reports, "No, he uses an inhalant to initially knock them unconscious in transit. There aren't any other traces of drugs apart from the surface-level ones."

He nodded, seeming to mull it over. He imagined the scent of their skin, standing over the autopsy table, admiring the craftsmanship. He saw dusty soil, a brand of lotion, and the heavy moisture of a mine or a cellar, "The operation and other tears are posthumous. Do they believe our Billy created them both?"

"Not sure. Only thing is: the fishhooks are too close together to be mistakes." He noticed them, where they puckered the skin, touched the photo with the tip of his finger, "It's no wonder the boys who found her were reluctant to come forward."

"Were they running a trotline?" Will asked, and Clarice's confusion showed on her face, "Fish and Game violation. Big fine."

Clarice made a note, "I'll do a follow-up. I doubt it'll matter- they found her regardless." Hannibal turned back to her, and noticed her jumping foot; an unconscious stress reflex

Clarice herself didn't recognise half the time.

"What is it you're not saying, Clarice?" He asked, almost accusatory.

She considered whether to tell him. The surgeon in him would dissect her either way: "They're finding bugs in the victims. Found a moth cocoon in Bimmel, pushed down her throat." He thought he recognised her face. Freddie Lounds did a number on her- *well*, several.

Hannibal was concerned she'd try to do the same to Will. He could still smell her perfume on him. He had hardly touched on what they'd talked about since the interview had happened.

"Has she been missing for long?"

"She was the first one taken. Latest one found." Clarice answered, her leg still shaking.

"Why is that?"

"He weighed her down, hoping she wouldn't be." She was being very pragmatic about it all, "After that, he got lazy."

Will was watching her. Calmly, like studying a painting at a gallery, "You saw her." She'd only just realised, when he spoke to her: "Didn't you?"

Clarice swallowed back a sigh, a wash of nausea circling in her stomach. The veiny blueness of her clammy skin, the hingeless jaw unnaturally agape, eyes wide and blind: "Yes. I did."

"How did you--"

"I was there to identify her, take her prints when she was--"

"No. How did you feel?" Will asked, a kindness to him. She dithered, stalled, furrowed her brows. It wasn't often she faced that question in it's sincerity.

And she didn't know if she liked the answer. The nausea felt like guilt.

"Changed." She chose, thinking of the cocoon in Bimmel's throat- feeling one in hers, stopping her speech. Her heart was fluttering like a nesting bird.

Hannibal saw the emotionality whirl behind her eyes, conflict trying to restore itself. He was smiling, almost imperceptibly. Will didn't want to look at her, it was like looking at a mirror from years ago, "Do you have scars, Agent Starling?"

She didn't know whether to lie, but thought otherwise. Emotional and physical could be one in the same- heart muscles in atrophy, the wounds we deal one another, "Some."

"Will Frederica Bimmel's death be counted among them?"

She hardened her resolve without meaning to, defence going up, "I can't say. I'd give it a month to settle in."

Hannibal nodded, curious, "Is your father's?"

Will could read Clarice's grief like a book, and watched the question abruptly marred her face. She looked back at Will, the anger behind her eyes, tight in her throat, "Don't look at me, I've never been able to control him."

There was a moment where she looked like she might try to smash the glass between them. Will could imagine, her eyes tearful and red, her mouth in a scream, smashing the cell with her chair and knocking down Hannibal in a flash, gun drawn and shoved under his jaw. She'd cock the gun. Breathing hard, weeping, scorned. Hell hath no fury.

Hannibal wouldn't flinch. Will didn't know what he'd do. Probably just sit and watch.

"I think we're done here, Doctor." Clarice snapped, getting up from her seat, snapping it shut with one hand as she put it back. Without another word, she walked out.

"Fly away, Agent Starling." Hannibal called after her, "Fly far, far away."

She didn't slow down until she got to her car. Didn't feel relief until she slammed the door, turned the key, and drove away. Her eyes felt sore. Her whole body tight.

She had to pull over as she began to cry.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

When I first saw you
The end was soon
To Bethlehem
It slouched and then
Must've caught a good look at you.
-Hozier, *NFWMB*

Will has a therapy session with Chilton. Manipulation ensues. Clarice meets with Hannibal, and is finally given a tangible lead- as well as told an allegory. Or worse, a prediction.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Will was barely listening to whatever it was Chilton was talking about. *Something something* echopraxia *something something*. Some kind of analysis he'd undoubtedly heard from Hannibal at some point or another, dolled up with scientific jargon to make it seem more complicated. It wasn't original. His jaw began to hurt from being strapped to the chair, rendered unable to move so much as his fingers, like they were about to perform some kind of electro-shock therapy, "How about we try this," Chilton offered, finally catching Will's fleeting attention, "Imagine that everyone you know is in a room discussing you."

"I can guess that's already happened. Since our happy return." Will mused, finally looking at him, "What did *you* say about me?"

He ignored him: "You will never find out what they said, or who said what. What do you think is the most positive thing they'd say about you?"

It was clearly excluding Hannibal, considering he'd dominate the conversation entirely. Will scoffed a little, blasé and easy: "Charm, good looks."

He almost failed to hold back a sigh, "What's the most negative?"

Will took a breath, "What would you say that is? What am I like?" He asked, teasingly, "Come on, Frederick, surprise me. Say something intelligent."

Chilton's jaw tensed, then he readjusted, going all professional: "You have subclinical psychopathy traits that you sublime through the use of imagination. Your empathy excludes a full autism-based diagnosis; a personality disorder isn't out of the question. Your feeling

towards everything are probably on two sides... even with Hannibal." He saw Will's eyes focus on him steadily, waiting to feel contempt, "Love and hate as one."

He stared at him, fixated: "Go on."

"You walk on the border between extreme lucidity and madness. You're oversensitive. Hyperaware. But you don't lack control anymore. And, for that, there are plenty of people who would argue that you're a murderer."

He said *murderer* as if it had an ugly glare to it, lurid, like a swear in a child's mouth. He meant it as a weapon. But it came across as a misused slur.

Will considered it heartily, pursing his lips, then attempted a shrug under his constraints, "I've been called worse things by better people."

Chilton was losing patience, "Your cognitive awareness has always made it impossible for you to do something unless you believe it to be the right decision. Whether that be under a deluded sense of moral integrity, or a complete lack of one, thanks to your *darling* husband." He slurred, crossing one leg over the other. Will's eyes moved away from him in thought. He mistook it for vulnerability, "Do you agree? Admit to it, even?"

Will tutted, all at once disappointed, "You should've left it there."

"Why do you say that?"

"Sometimes it's better to keep your mouth shut and give the impression of stupidity." He said, cutting, "Than to open it, and remove all doubt." He was amusingly easy to offend. Will innocently blinked at him, as he glared, alarmingly close to snapping his pen in half, "I'm not about to admit anything to you; you can try to provoke me as much as you like." That took him down a peg or two, probably.

"What if I were to say--"

"You don't have any leverage you can manipulate, Frederick." He said, smiling, on the verge of laughing at him, "Not now the FBI are on your back. If you try to separate us, or *punish* us, or interfere in any way you'd be interfering with their investigation. Jack could even get you fired for it." His brow ticked up, "You're losing your grip."

That stripped him bare. His expression fluttered, exposed and angry, "This *my* hospital. You're under *my* care- Jack Crawford can complain all he likes, but Agent Starling is a guest, using my patients to their advantage, to try to work a case he can't figure out by himself; if there is anyone losing their grip, it isn't me."

Will gave him a disbelieving look, vaguely surprised, like he'd just lied to his face: "You're very expendable, Frederick." He said, quietly, "If you don't believe that, you're more gullible than I thought."

He glowered, his characteristic petulance coming off him in waves, "What would you recommend, if you know so much?"

"You must be desperate, then, to try to come to your patients for advice." He scolded, nothing short of bitchy, "I'm legally insane, *remember?*"

Chilton did sigh this time, more of a huff, "And I could've sworn I was dealing with an adult."

Will smiled, "I rest my case." He looked away again, eyes fixed on the knot of Chilton's tie or his forehead, invoking self-consciousness. He'd stirred up in him that he was secretly worried about- made him anxious, malleable, "What did Alana Bloom say, then, in those little meetings?"

He hadn't expected that: "Why do you ask?"

Will frowned, "Old times sake?"

"She hardly mentions you, at least, not by name." He told him bluntly, "You would have to ask her. That is, if you ever see her again. She's not interested in paying you a visit." That earned a more genuine frown, until his face was closed again.

Clarice, with mere hours of light sleep, had woken up from a dream *fuming*. A realisation had come to her in the night between cloudy, fractured nightmares, and Hannibal's voice spoke to her in her head. *Our Billy wasn't born a criminal; it was abuse.*

He's more scared of you than you are of him.

And she just *knew*.

"You knew him as a patient, didn't you Doctor?"

"Good afternoon, Agent Starling. So nice to see you again."

"Answer me." Hannibal stopped sketching and met her gaze serenely.

"Yes. I did."

She hadn't wanted to be right.

"And you didn't think this information was pertinent before? I considered you smarter than that, Doctor."

"I didn't feel the need to answer a question that hadn't been asked of me." Clarice found it even more frustrating that she didn't have Will there to absolve her anger.

"You agreed to help me."

"I am, Clarice. You merely need to work it out."

She stood there, looking at him. All the advice and the snippy comments and the links he made to her father had left her waking at night in fits and starts. Dreams and memories were

hard to discern.

Her brain was on overdrive trying to make sense of it all; from chasing up police leads into domestic disputes and childhood abuse, to going back over the hoard of case files, to visiting the newly-packed graves of the girls that had been put in the ground by the killer she was trying to catch.

Questions they'd thrown at her plagued her like a swarm of moths. Intruders in her skull, pestering: Why do you think he does it? All on the heavy side? Roomy? Is it sexually motivated? Is that why you're so nervous? Does he use needles? You have read the case file, haven't you? How did you feel? Is it because you've suffered a significant loss in your life? Do you hide your pain to avoid confrontation?

His death hurt just the same, *didn't it?*

She thought she was going out of her mind. Will Graham made more sense to her in those moments than anyone ever had.

When she was wrangled in to help on their recapture it was the same. All those shitty, paper-scattered late nights of reading until the words started to bleed and strain. Pen in her mouth, typing away, flicking through notes and articles and photos. She'd been there when they found the pile of bodies they'd left them, the writing in blood on the wall. She'd been there as she figured out the assault tactic for the address they'd managed to pinpoint. She'd been there once the gunfire and death had ceased, and watched, as bodies were being bagged, the trucks that drove them both away.

Upon opening her eyes every morning, it felt like she had been staring up at the ceiling in the dark, for hours on end. Ardelia had once made a joke about wanting to run her blood- to check she wasn't high.

She never drank coffee, didn't care for the taste, but she'd taken up the habit ever since.

"Give me something to go on." She proposed, collecting her chair and taking a seat, poised with her notebook, "Not vagaries. Not psychoanalysis. I'm on the clock. Give me something to *do*."

Hannibal seemed to sympathise, and went back to his drawing as he said: "Go to Split City. Look for Mrs. Eudora Hoyles."

"What will I find there, Doctor?" He didn't look up. Faintly, she remembered how pleased he was when she said she saw Frederica's corpse, "Will I find one of your victims?"

"What you'll find there is not of my design."

"Whose is it then?"

"I can't say. It was coveted how it was found. All present and accounted for." She didn't know what he could be talking about. A letter? A memento? Something to do with their time on the run? She doubted he'd want to share that time with her, though. It was a private affair.

"Why not tell the police?"

"They have the tendency to investigate that sort of thing." He replied simply, glancing up, "And, by association, me. It wouldn't have been convenient at the time. I'm telling you now."

"Why not leave whatever it is to be found? If it's so important, and something the police would be interested in, why not leave it in plain sight?"

"Conservation. Museums can do it, stealing what doesn't belong to them, from other cultures and indigenous people, for thousands of years. What harm is this doing, in the grand scheme?" He sparred, brushing away bits of eraser, and properly looking her in the eyes, "They can do it, why can't I?"

"You're not a curator."

He tilted his head rightly, "I was, once."

"Fine." She decided, fishing out her notebook, "I'll track her down."

"Good. I'd love to know your thoughts." Clarice couldn't see what he was drawing, but it was her, in place of John Everett Millias' *Ophelia*. He was giving detail to the floating poppies-potent symbols of sleep and death. Her end of the bargain was incomplete, and she waited for a question, hoping to not be dealt a wound: "Are you familiar with the allegory of the wise deer and the cowardly tiger, Clarice?"

She exhaled a breath she didn't know she was holding, "Is it a children's tale?"

"Depends on who you ask."

"What is it, then?"

"Two fawns, roaming here and there, wander into a cave. Their mother deer follows them, grazing, and notices bones strewn around across the floor. She realises it's a tiger's cave, and sees the tiger approaching." He told her, eyes downcast as he continued shading, "In a moment of clarity amongst her panic, she shouts that her children need not cry, and that she will catch the tiger for her children to eat.

Disturbed by this, fearing a bolder predator has invaded his territory, the tiger flees."

"Is that it?"

He didn't take offence to her interruption, "Not quite. A jackal, curious about the tigers' fear, forms a pact to ambush this strange newcomer, and they tie their tails together in solidarity. In doing so, one cannot cheat the other." He continued, looking up, "The deer sees them coming together, she claims the jackal is her ally, and he has caught the tiger for them all to feast upon. Threatened and betrayed, the tiger starts running. He forgets the jackal is still tied to him, whom he drags through the underbrush, cracking him against rocks on the way, until the Tigers' tail is ripped off, and the jackal is dead. The deer and her fawns escape unharmed." He signed the bottom of the page, putting down his pencil to clasp his hands together, providing his full attention.

The comparison unsettled Clarice. She didn't know who the jackal represented. The warning came across that doing the right and honest thing, could easily get you killed.

He was either referring to a predicted eventual outcome, or an outcome that had already played out. Cliff tops came to mind.

"What's the moral of the story?"

Hannibal smiled a little, "A presence of mind and intelligence can save us from dangerous situations. And a reminder that fleeing isn't always the worst of two options." He stated, his dark gaze seeming to dissect her, "Better to be safe, than sorry."

Clarice scowled, "If I was running away from this, I wouldn't be running from a fantasy, Doctor."

"Both the fantastical and the real can do equal shares of harm, Clarice." He said, getting up and rounding the desk to be standing as he addressed her, "We, however," He approached her, her body pumped adrenaline as he moved ever closer, and when he tapped on the glass twice with his knuckles the tension snapped in two, "Cannot hurt you."

Clarice blinked, stytic, "What are you telling me? Who is who?"

He took a breath, moved away. In truth, he considered himself as the deer. Clarice, the tiger; Will would've abhorred at being called a fawn. With the jackal, Hannibal could only guess: "In my eyes, Clarice, our good friend Billy is the tiger whose cave you are trapped inside. You are the doe, protector from harm, and the most preyed upon creature in the forest." He didn't know he preferred that casting, yet he met her concerned eyes all the same, "But the tiger does not rule thee."

Chilton fell in step with Clarice as she made her way out of the building, catching up with her as she was let through another security door, "What you're doing, Miss Starling, is coming into my hospital, to conduct an interview with my patient, and refusing to share information with me! For the forth time!"

Clarice sighed, in need of another three boosts of caffeine before feeling present enough to deal with him, "Doctor Chilton, I've told you, this is a follow-up on the Bimmel case, and I've gotten a lead from Lecter about--"

"He's my patient! I have rights!" The grizzled skin of his left hand grabbed her wrist, and she turned to him abruptly, vexed, "I'm not some turnkey, Miss Starling." He let go as quickly as he held her, straightening himself out in the place of an apology. Clarice reigned in her anger, and let herself sigh, despising him in that second more than any criminal she'd ever encountered.

She pulled a card out of her pocket and handed it to him.

"I'm acting on instruction. This is the card of the US attorney. Either let her re-explain it to you, in words you'd better understand- or let me do my job." That left him stumped,

discredited, and she walked away.

Chapter End Notes

Ooooooh, things are about to get ramped up.

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

I pray you, sweetheart, counsel me whether it is better to speak, or to die?

-Marguerite de Navarre, *The Heptameron*

Will, sleepless and fresh from his therapy, misses his dogs, and the life they once had. A letter is sent off. Hannibal talks to (threatens) Alana, who remains distant and perturbed. Chilton confronts them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"How are you, mon coeur?" Hannibal asked, trying to read, getting distracted.

Will had come back from his therapy session silently. He was lying on his cot and staring up at the ceiling, and had probably been doing so for a while. He'd said before that if all the furniture wasn't bolted down, he would've moved their beds together immediately. He hadn't been sleeping well, "It's too early to tell."

"Attempt honesty, for me?"

He sighed, "Could be better... could be *worse*. I can't exactly complain. No one listens to me anyway."

"What could make it better?"

"The rules forbid such things," He turned to look at him, one eyebrow raised, "As well you know."

Hannibal remained affectless: "Aren't rules meant to be broken?"

He scowled, "Are you hitting on me?"

"Would you like it if I did?" They stared at each other.

"Give me a pen and I'll give you my autograph."

Hannibal smiled, "There are more indelicate ways to mark a person, Will." Will threw a scrunched up ball of origami paper at him. Hannibal caught it easily. He didn't know why he'd hidden it, unless it was just for ammunition: "Your reflexes haven't suffered much." He offered, placidly, as Will pretended to ignore him again.

"Oh, such *discerning* eyes."

"I'd be happy to put your reflexes to good use." Now he knew exactly what he was trying to do, and Will gave him a stern, marital look, as you would a cat.

"Don't try it." It was such a rehearsed phrase, he'd probably said it in vastly different situations. Alana dreaded to think.

"Apologies."

"Forgiven." He then noticed the gentle smile on his face, "You're not sorry."

Hannibal looked over to him again, properly this time, feigning innocence, "Would you like to make me?"

Hannibal didn't catch the book that was launched at his leg. He figured he deserved it.

Will sighed and got up, stretching. The matter was dropped, "Did you get that letter sent off?"

He'd almost forgotten about that. Almost, "Yes."

"How did you get the documents?"

"By contacting the woman-in-charge. She didn't answer me with words, but she did with the correct papers."

Will nodded, drowsy. He remembered the desperate scuttling of claws on wood whenever Chiyoh dropped anything through the letterbox. One bark and they'd all be off, "I miss the dogs." He said, without really thinking.

"I know you do."

He didn't like that tone, "And you don't?"

"I'd gotten used to them being around." If the response didn't come quick enough it would've been too obvious an answer, "I must admit, it's been strange to not have even seen one in the past few months."

"I keep thinking I see them out of the corner of my eye. Imagine them in here with us."

"That would be a difficult situation to live in."

Will hadn't overlooked that, he just disagreed, "It'd be good to see one again. Good to see the old ones."

He was trying to get at something. Hannibal yielded to him, stopped his reading, "I can draw you them. You need only ask." Will crossed to the desk, and leant back in one of the chairs, restlessly. He craved something to snack on- like seeds, or mints, or even raisins, for fucks sake. The food left much to be desired. And, more importantly, he was obscenely bored, "Simply the sight of a dog would probably be enough to lighten your mood."

"Is that really a character flaw? Have you *seen* dogs?"

"I can understand it." He remedied, not exactly conceding the point. Tiredly, Will admired the drawings stuck to the wall, and tried to imagine himself elsewhere. Sitting by the poolside, or out on a balcony overlooking the sea. Gulls crying, the sound of waves and sea. The salt on the air, on skin.

"It'd be good to have a window."

"Solely for that purpose?"

"What other purpose is there?" Dog-spotting seemed like a better hobby than none. He'd already taught Hannibal about breeds he hadn't known about before, but he didn't get very far, and it seemed a shame to stop there.

"Mental escapism isn't always enough." He mused, the graphite sketch of the Palazzo Vecchio somewhat faded by the light, "Selfishly, it'd be good to have a tangible view to draw. My memory of places can only bide so much time."

Will looked off, checked the papers at the desk, and drew a nought in a grid. He was silent for a long enough time that Hannibal thought he wouldn't respond at all: "Do you think back on it? Before all this?"

"I don't know how that could be avoided." His sincerity was oddly touching.

"Do you miss it?" He uttered, quieter.

"With all that I have." Hannibal said, simply, regarding Will's face in profile, scar and all, and feeling suddenly warmed by his presence, "I'm grateful to not have to miss you, too."

If he was in a better mood, Will would've laughed at that, "It isn't the same, though."

"I know." He wanted to hug him, hold him, "I'm sorry about the dogs, Will."

He knew that meant more than just the dogs- knew Hannibal, in his better thought patterns, would want nothing more than to make Will the happiest he could ever be. But, in truth, he already did, "Yeah. So am I." It was an intimate moment. Only, shared, with the other constant company in the room: "How are my dogs, Alana?" He didn't turn to the camera; it's attention was always on him, "How's Winston? That is, if you didn't auction them all off?"

Alana had only been paying them mind like you would music, just background noise, being otherwise occupied with papers and her own life, unless anything sudden were to happen. It was safe to say they now had her full attention.

"Does he still try to run all the way back? Back to Wolf Trap? Or, has he realised I'm not coming home anymore?" Will asked, obviously not expecting an answer. Alana didn't know what to make of his tirade, "Buster is probably dead. Wouldn't surprise me if he picked a fight with something he shouldn't have, for the last time. He used to pick fights with the vacuum-- little devil." Talking about them felt like twisting a knife in his own stomach. It was worse than thinking about anyone he'd lost or left, because dogs just don't have the luxury of

understanding. They remained unaware. Unconditional and endless love. It could cause him endless heartbreak if he let it, "Did he fight till the end? Did he not want to let go?"

Will listened to the silence, and sighed heavily, upset by himself. Alana felt his wound.

Hannibal picked up the one-sided conversation, "What will you do, Alana? After all this time?" She stared at his blurred pixelated face on the screen, could feel his stare as if he was in the room. Her eyes didn't waver, "Will you fight till the end, or will you run?"

They weren't talking to themselves, and they knew it. Just as someone praying can feel someone listening.

Then, like the Red Sea, the doors groaned open.

Only for Chilton to come tip-tapping into the room. He was clearly unimpressed: "Doctor Bloom isn't interested in your *mind games*, Hannibal. She isn't exactly likely to reply."

Hannibal peered over to him, entertained, "Do you speak for her, Frederick? The jester of the courtroom, no less?"

It seemed that sometimes Chilton hoped to be treated with respect, only for his hopes to be dashed for the thousandth time, "Unless you were to have a personality transplant- and even then, it would be up for debate- it's a rare to nonexistent chance that you'll see her in person again. For as long as you both shall live."

"Why is that?"

"You made a threat against her life. The life of her family. By the reputation that proceeds you, Hannibal, that isn't a threat to be taken lightly." He explained, sardonic, "Between you and me: she doesn't like you very much."

Will was surprised by his boldness of wit. Maybe he'd had an effect, "And me?"

"I think the marriage has sealed you together as one identity. That, and the crimes." He stated, intentionally offhanded, like poking a bear: "Can't have one, without the other."

"If Alana is overly concerned for her safety, she has to realise we aren't harmful behind this glass."

That earned a blunt, skeptical chuckle, more of a scoff, "Not physically, no. Just as a wild animal won't attack if bars halt it's path." He suggested, sly, "You'd both be difficult to manage, even if you came with instructions, and if we stopped you from talking it would ruin the point. So, her presence would be defeatist. Like letting two big cats toy with a sheep."

Will quirked a brow, taken aback, "You really view *Alana Bloom* to be defenceless?"

He appeared to mull it over, grimaced slightly, "That would be how she views herself, deep down. She's not your biggest fan." He frowned, thoughtful, "If anything, I'd say she's *scared*."

"Of what?"

"You. Well, when it comes down to it, without immediate danger, responsibility. But mostly where you're concerned."

Will would much prefer to have the conversation face-to-face with Alana herself. It felt strange to be talking about her as if she couldn't hear, despite it being her choice to stay uninvolved. It wasn't in her nature to avoid problems, but fear explained the change, "Why?"

"You're certainly not the person Doctor Bloom remembers you being." He told him, "Jack doesn't know you, either."

"But you do?"

"I know you act far more vulnerable than you are. Far more innocent." He said innocent with an edge to it. Like someone had a grip on his shoulder, "I think they're worried. And disappointed."

Will held back yet another sigh, too exasperated to analyse what that could mean. He deferred to bland resignation: "Life is full of disappointments." He then added: "Ask your parents."

He remained unbothered, continuing: "People who strive to fix things, like Doctor Bloom, feel compelled to keep you from dramatic change. Knowing your knack for empathy, you have the ability to mimic and learn from others. Like a child. They think you're too impressionable, and easily harmed."

"Everyone is easily harmed." Will retorted, without expression. Chilton squared his jaw.

"Have you seen yourself lately? You can't deny to be different to before. You decided to mimic and learn from a serial killer. Multiple, even." He stepped forward, "Hannibal Lecter is your role model."

Will's eyes burned through his face, until it was replaced with a plastered-on smile. It did enough to prove his point, just about: "Mirrors don't lie, Frederick. And, lucky for you, they don't laugh." He glanced at Hannibal, who was focused on Chilton, steely, dead-eyed. It was always strange to watch him witness a conversation that was about him, instead of directed to him. He looked like an attack dog. *His* attack dog: "Hannibal is supportive, as any spouse should be. Belittling me to one set influence is atrociously poor of you; especially as my psychiatrist."

"You don't think of yourself as changed?" He scoffed, voice shrill in disbelief, "Not even by him?"

Will thought about it, as he often did, like two mirrors reflecting back on themselves. The same, identical, light bouncing off each other where darkness resided, in a constant loop of absorption and deflection, that granted no superior. *Always* refracting.

"We're changed by everyone we know, especially those we love. Personality can be altered by an inspiring film character, or a kind friend, or a great love." Will said, feeling Hannibal's eyes on him like the sun. Chilton seemed discouraged, correct in the encouragement towards

murder that Hannibal gave, but he'd failed to give Will due credit. He was his *equal*. He understood why Alana would sooner bury herself away, than confront them both. Will sighed, half-shrugging: "But, at your core, you're still the same."

"...Yes." Chilton agreed, proved wrong, but a little right, watching them both. He met his gaze: "That's what the fear is."

Chapter End Notes

"You can't hide forever!" And she won't.

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

She had brushed her teeth before vomiting as well, never able to utterly crush the optimistic streak in her nature.

-Edward St. Aubyn, *Patrick Melrose*

Chilton leaves, and Clarice arrives. Rain-soaked, exhausted, and angry.

Will hadn't seen a better example of someone busting into a room, than the way Clarice came in, mere hours after Chilton had left. They'd not expected her to come back, and it was last dwindling hours of visiting time. He watched her from his bed- alarmed. Her hair wet; her stare hard. They'd already set up the chair for her this time, for some reason, and he was surprised she didn't throw it across the room when she stormed towards it. There were flames behind her eyes.

"Mrs *Eudora Hoyles*, Doctor?" She snapped, "As in, *lose-your-head*. Mrs. *Lose-Your-Head*. As in, you rented that unit, Doctor Lecter, and *you* put those things in there, and *you* did that ten years in advance- why do that?"

Hannibal was standing in the middle of the cell. They'd turned off the lights so only the weak, storm-coloured dusk-light dropped in from above; eerily dark, mostly in shadow, as if the night had come early. His back was to her. He was lost in his imagination until he said, "Your bleeding has stopped."

She blinked, suddenly self-conscious, "How did you--" She visibly deflated, "It's nothing. Just a scratch."

"Why don't you ask me about Buffalo Bill?"

"Why don't you tell me about Mrs Hoyles? You wanted me to find him. Or do I have to wait for the lab?"

Will abstractedly wondered how Jimmy and Zeller were doing, but didn't ask.

"This has really gotten to you, Clarice. Do you always take the unexpected as a personal attack? Surprise parties written off the list?"

"What's gotten to me is your scheming." She couldn't see where he was in the corners of the cell- Will was merely a shape in the righthand corner, only his feet shown by the light. She pushed her dripping hair out of her face.

"I respectfully disagree, Clarice."

"Who was left in that storage unit?"

"Would you believe me now?"

"What has he got to do with the case that you're conveniently not saying, Doctor? Or have I fed into a pack of lies?"

There was a sudden slam that made Clarice's heart jump to her throat. It was the tray. When Hannibal moved away from it again, she went over to it, and collected a fresh towel, to dry herself off. She took a breath, and brought it up to rub her hair. She didn't know what to say, only: "Thank you."

There was a considerate pause as she sat back down, her exhaustion bleeding through.

"Fortunately for you, Agent Starling, I'm not a liar."

"Prove it."

"Benjamin Raspail." Hannibal said, moving into the light, looking at her, "A former patient of mine. I didn't kill him, I only tucked him away. I left him as I found him. In that abandoned car, in his own house, after he'd missed three appointments." Clarice was writing in a frenzy, sent reeling. Hannibal was placidly still, "You'd have him under Missing Persons. An apt title, in his case."

She looked up and stared at him, stunned, the towel forgotten in her lap: "Who killed him, if not you?"

"Who can say? Best thing for him, really. His therapy was going nowhere."

The admission had thrown her for a loop. It felt pivotal, like a wind upon a wave.

"How did you feel?"

"What?"

"How did you feel when you saw him?" Will asked. She stopped her writing to look at him, and she could hardly see his face.

But she could see the face in that unit, all made-up, almost pressing itself up against the glass; the liquid it was submerged in like amniotic fluid, foggy and perfectly preserving it. When she got closer, the cylindrical glass warped her perception, and it changed depending on the angle, on the light. A crack bright lightning, or the flash of a torch, and it was a ghostly apparition. In the dark it looked like an intruder. Greyed skin the texture of soaked tissue. Eyes swollen shut, like a newborn child's eyes. The fake hair floating, moving as one entity, coming away from the scalp. A wet specimen in a jar. She swallowed.

"Scared. Then... exhilarated."

"Why?"

"Because you weren't wasting my time." The reply felt too prepared, like she'd put a wall up. Maybe Jack had given her a talking-to.

"Were you praised for your discovery? Any advancements?"

Clarice offered a curt, humourless laugh, "In this career, you get what you can. Sometimes going above and beyond, on your own, is applauded, and you're awarded for it. Other times..." She trailed off, watching Will watch her, "You're not."

Myriam, Will. *You*.

"Do you have something you use, when you need to muster up courage, Clarice?" Hannibal posited, intrigued, "A breathing technique, a memory, a tableaux... Something of greater trauma from your earlier life?"

She bit down on her tongue, "I don't know. I'll have to check next time."

He narrowed his eyes, appraising her, "How is your relationship with Doctor Chilton?" That was a jump: "Does he intimidate you?"

"Intimidate... *no*."

"Do you find him offensive?"

Probably a bad call to answer that question, as much as they both knew the answer, "Why?"

"I'm conducting a survey." Good enough reason as any.

"Offensive- not necessarily. I don't know if the entirety of it is on purpose. It's the default for him, to be-- patronising, when dealing with the damaged, and insane, I suppose."

"Does he make you uncomfortable?"

"Not as much as you do."

"Does he flirt with you?" It was an unexpected question that Clarice didn't even want to consider feasible, judging by the expression that briefly crossed her features.

She shrugged a little, remaining composed. Spare the slight furrow to her brow, "He has the tendency to talk down to people."

Hannibal inclined his head, "Perhaps he's playing hard-to-get?"

Will scoffed, "Hard-to-*get*? Hard-to-*like*." She felt obliged to agree.

"Why are you really asking, Doctor?"

He feigned indifference, "Solely out of concern for you. He might go on about how corrupting we are, and the manipulation we're capable of- but sometimes I wonder if that's manipulation in and of itself. A red herring."

"You can't expect him not to warn me." She wondered if sometimes he was picturing their conversations happening elsewhere, outside of time and space, in a chapel or a garden, anywhere but where they were. He seemed to forget he was in a glass box so disconnected from the world they may as well have been underground. Somehow, it seemed to slip his mind *why* he was there, too: "Is it not manipulation, to tell me to watch out for him? That seems hypocritical, sir."

He smiled, full of what seemed like pride, "You can keep the towel."

"Is *that* a manipulation?"

"You're under attack on all fronts, Agent Starling." He admitted, trite, "You shouldn't see two sides. We aren't your enemies, despite how much Chilton likes to help you believe so. If I were you, I'd hardly go to him for any help, or assurances."

Chilton was working with her, letting her into his hospital, and all. As unbearable as he could be, he wasn't a murderer, or a sadomasochist, or a cannibal. It was sad to think that to be his only commendable trait. But, in a lot of ways, the two cannibals before her treated her less like an object- like a piece of meat- than any other man in there.

Still, she reckoned it to be a worse idea to go to the world-renowned cannibalistic serial killer for help: "Chilton is a Doctor."

"So am I."

Realistically, she couldn't deny that he had a point. Trust was neither her strong-suit, nor relevant to any of this; no matter who it was placed with, right or wrong, it would be damaging in some way. It was a losing game.

Then, she recalled what Chilton had mentioned to her before the first session: "I forgot to ask a question that isn't to do with the Buffalo Bill case."

"I think you've asked plenty of those." Will noted, lounging.

"Dare to answer another?" She could hear his smile in his words without seeing it.

"Depends who's asking."

"When you both surrendered at the same time, within seconds of each other, it was-- *unexpected*. It was unexpected for either of you to even surrender, or survive to be able to, given that it was shoot-on-sight. But even then, your timing was bizarre."

"Your question?" Will replied, "Or rather, Doctor Chilton's question?"

It was everyone's question: "How did you do it?"

Will chuckled, deep and rich, "You don't believe in the rumours, then? Don't think we have telepathic communication? Can't see how synchronised we are?"

"Some people beyond your rank certainly can, Clarice." Hannibal parried. She felt made fun of.

"Regretfully, I'm not that naïve, sir."

"Why do you want to know?" Will was still tickled. Clarice matched his mischievous smile.

"Curiosity."

He appreciated the answer, and sat up, illuminated, "Well, you're right not to believe rumours- it's surprising you don't buy into that sort of thing." He gathered, "After all, nothing beats a good old fashioned conversation."

"I'm sorry?"

Will's smile widened, "We just agreed on a time to surrender. Not everything we do is that deep. I used a kitchen egg timer. He just counted down." Clarice didn't say anything, "What's the matter? Did you lose a bet?"

She snapped back to herself, "How did you decide?"

"As soon as they didn't snipe us from the rooftops or kill us in our sleep, we knew your plan wouldn't be as logical as to take the easy way out. Get it over with, so to speak." Will shrugged, frowning cluelessly, "Jack Crawford wanted us alive. And, without a well-timed surrender, the assault wouldn't have stopped, and it posed a higher risk of two head shots. Or only one."

"Besides," Hannibal added, "A flair for the dramatic never goes amiss."

It made perfect sense, but-- it seemed, just, *disappointing*? When everything else was disguised as anagrams, and metonyms, and half-truths, like poetry, something that made perfect sense didn't feel reliable. But, by God, it was refreshing. She wondered how far she could get them to go with it.

"Before the shootout, there was the massacre that led us right to you..."

Will thought about it, and said it anyway, "Yeah, I did."

The words died and fell from her mouth before she could process what he'd just said, "The Feast, as it was called. The writing you left was a reference to--"

"You've asked more than one question, Clarice." Hannibal interrupted, "It's only fair to take turns." He said it as if he was giving her a choice, which he wasn't. She stared at an indecipherable Will, and relented.

"Okay, Doctor. Shoot."

"What's your worst memory from childhood, Agent Starling?"

Her eyes glazed over, "Why would--"

"Don't stall. I don't want your worst invention."

"The death of my father."

And just like that, she felt vivisected.

"Elaborate on that." He encouraged, clinically, "If you lie, I will know."

She remembered to breathe, and said: "He worked security. He was shot whilst doing his job. I was ten years old at the time."

"Did he last long?" Will asked, gently.

"A month." She was talking plainly, without thinking, "He'd become my whole world. After he left me, I had nobody."

"What of your mother?"

"She died when I was too young to remember it."

Will offered his sympathy with a genuinely empathetic look- not the same awkward, banal ones she normally received. It was a look she recognised in herself.

He knew that pain, like a horrible wound.

Clarice looked back at Hannibal, not wanting to let his understanding unearth her grief. And Will sat back again, unseeable.

"You're very frank, Clarice. It must be intriguing to know you privately." Hannibal said, offering no comfort. She moved past it.

"Now you tell me what I need to know, about Buffalo Bill."

"I've given it to you. You need to figure it out." He argued, watching her tenuous patience drain away, "Have you thought about it?"

"About what? I don't--"

"Think harder."

On the spot, she took a guess: "You said *thee* in our last session. It struck me as odd."

"*And the tiger does not rule thee*. Tell me about that."

"I don't know what to say, you're too--"

"Do you ever suppose that there is more than just the surface to what people say, Clarice? Enthrall me with your wisdom. You haven't got much time, however. Poor Catherine Martin has been taken for twenty eight hours or so now: one day gone. He only keeps them for three."

She was all too aware. As an initial reaction, the night after the Senator's speech and one of the more challenging sessions, in a state of tired, morbid pessimism in the early hours, she set a timer of seventy two hours. Before it reached twenty minutes gone, she stopped it. Then she turned over in bed, into another nightmare.

Hannibal noted her pallor, and the dark rings around her eyes, that looked like bruises in the right light. He was reminded of how sick Will once was, and took pity: "You'll have to think fast, Clarice." He intoned, consolingly, "Sleep on it."

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind-
-Emily Dickinson, *Tell All the Truth but Tell it Slant*

Clarice sits with all that's happening, and, after a phone call with Jack, everything begins to fall into place. But beginnings are always violent.

Chapter Notes

I'll probably update this soon even though it is Christmas, just because some of us need that escape from all the festive familial horror. Happy holidays! Thank you so much for reading this, and joining me for the ride- it's gonna continue to be a wild one! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

After the session, Clarice sat in her car. She'd tried the engine four times, and it wouldn't start- the radio wouldn't turn on either, probably down to a battery problem. So instead, she sat there, in silence, thoughts fluttering in her head like desperate papery insects on a whirring lightbulb. Running at full speed on neutral. The towel was in the backseat.

She felt as if she was looking at herself through the eyes of another person, staring at nothing.

Breathing in, and out, trying to ground herself, she looked at the rearview image of the hospital. All those people inside that imposing brick building. The orderlies in their white linens walking down the corridors, back and forth, patrols, meal times. Ants in a fortified nest. From the outside, apart from the cold wind and her breathing, it was oddly quiet. Deathly. Like being in a living graveyard.

She thought of Catherine Martin, then. Wondered if she was stuck somewhere. Whether she was tied, or gagged, or shut in a box; if she was crying, or drugged, or sleeping, or eating out of her hands, or praying for her life. Asking for someone to save her. Maybe she was fighting, trying to claw at his eyes. Maybe she was doing what Clarice was- sitting alone and in silence, looking at herself from a far-off perspective.

She found herself considering the perspective of the victims whenever she was idle, so vividly she'd lose herself in detailed, imaginary scenarios. In lectures, halfway through eating dinner, wrapped up in bed at night. She'd forget where she was; what she was doing. Ardelia had taken to checking up on her by touching her gently instead of abruptly snapping fingers in her face, and most of the time she'd start as if being woken up. It was like she was dreaming, or seeing a ghost. She certainly looked like someone who was being haunted.

It's people that are haunted. Not places, not even ruins, or shipwrecks, or battlefields. Places remain unchanged. Nature doesn't care.

The head she'd found floating in that jar once belonged to a person, called Benjamin Raspail. She visualised Hannibal walking into the anonymous garage, dressed in a fine coat, hair pushed back, and finding a cold, putrefying corpse propped up in the driver's seat.

She saw herself as she was now. Watched him round the car to see her face.

After ten minutes or so, of a cycle of dissociation then calming herself, only to think herself away again, Clarice decided to call God.

He picked up on the second ring: "Jack Crawford."

"It's me."

"Agent Starling," He sounded pleasant, "What have you got for me?"

The preserved head floated in the brine of her mind: "He could've planted insects before. It would be easy to miss in autopsy, because of the water. Can we check back on that?"

"All the other girls are in the ground." Jack muttered, "Exhumations would be too much on the family, but I can do it if we have to, even--"

"Then get the lab to check Raspail's head. Doctor Lecter's patient." She said, in a moment of epiphany.

"Why's that?"

"He was killed by the same man killing these girls. Lecter knows him." Jack was slow to reply. Too slow, "You knew that, didn't you? Or you would never have sent me into that hospital?" It came out of her before she even planned how to put it. She heard Jack sigh down the phone. There was a reluctant lull in the conversation.

"You've read his profile." Jack said, careful, "His psychiatric practice, combined with the travelling, teaching, consulting. He even testified at murder trials." He sighed, heavier, probably rubbing his face, or taking off his glasses. Clarice's own tiredness washed over her, "Who knows how many psychopaths he's allowed to roam free, just for the fun of it."

There was only one of them Clarice cared about at that moment. The one who'd created the disturbing things Lecter had decided to keep to himself.

"Raspail's soft tissues were preserved." Clarice added, "They'll find another cocoon."

"You seem pretty sure of that."

"I have to try to be sure of something." She replied, a weak smile on her face. She assumed he was writing something, or reading, or mulling it all over. For a moment, it seemed like he wouldn't say anything else.

Then: "How're you holding up?"

Clarice breathed a sudden chuckle, sounding almost delirious in the awkward quiet of her car, "Living the dream. Half the time it's a nightmare." The feeling was probably mutual, he just had better ways of coping. Maybe not better ways-- *older*: "But thank you for asking, sir."

Ardelia instantly agreed to swing by to pick her up from the hospital, after one of her lectures. Clarice stood facing away from the building, looking at the black, oncoming clouds, and smoked a cigarette.

She hardly touched the things, but they did well to take the edge off now and again. It wouldn't turn into a habit. An infrequent, poor method of dealing with it all seemed more likely. Hannibal had smelt tobacco on her, underneath any fragrances she'd used to disguise it.

What he'd said stuck around like a bad smell, as it so often did. *And the tiger does not rule thee*. The snarling buzz in *tiger*, the hum of the sloping end *thee*. It was irritatingly intriguing. What was it that he meant? It ran deeper than what he said, because, of course, nothing remained at face-value.

A bizarre feeling latched onto her that she's heard it before- it sounded like a slice of poetry, or line in Shakespeare-- it was something to do with English, or history. Perhaps she'd heard it in a class, or, God knows, at the zoo? It was possible.

Something to do with English language class danced around in her mind, even though she hardly remembered anything from before high school, and even when she got home and sat on the floor by her bed, it circled in the fray of her thinking. It felt like she was chasing feathers in a tornado, and they kept escaping her grasp. Her brain was trying to tell her something, just like it was in her dreams.

Something that just might come to her, if she stared hard enough at the beige of the carpet.

She could've heard a similar phrase in a film. Or, some linguistic term that matched. *That was it, wasn't it?* It was a fancy name. Historic... P-*something*. Associated with death-- or a dead language: Latin, probably. Clarice stood up and paced around her room, chewing the skin off her lips. The vague outline of the word stayed out of view, she couldn't quite see it. She knew she wanted to act out all her anger and frustration, and if she started she wouldn't stop, but it could hardly be a simple riddle that broke her. It seemed like it might end that way.

A shower, even after being drenched by the rain, felt like too much of an effort. Besides, the lavender scent of the shampoo could've been the one thing that would've knocked her out.

She decided to slide into bed, to heed her Doctor's advice, and sleep on it.

She buried herself under the duvet. Turned over, sighed. Then, turned back over and rearranged the pillow under her head. She blinked and it was three in the morning. She couldn't find a comfortable position to rest her legs. Her room was too warm when she startled awake. Another blink, and it was just gone six, the blue light of dawn breaking, too early for lucidity. There was a draft somewhere. A dog barked once in the distance.

Her brain couldn't switch off. She wanted nothing more than to sleep peacefully, no longer restless. Like the sleep of the dead.

The word, that *word* she could hardly make out, it chewed at her side. She remembered that it made essays sound pretentious. It would've been a good name for a lame band. Sometimes people's names were examples of it, but there were lists of these phrases given, on a pink worksheet, and it was explained that they meant the same if you--

Wait.

She scrambled out of bed, grabbed her phone, and dialled. It took minutes to patch her through, "*Et tiger non regit te*. A Latin palindrome."

Hannibal sounded more than awake, "You have me enthralled, Agent Starling. Continue."

"The oldest form of wordplay. It means the same either way you read it." Adrenaline thrummed in her, she wouldn't be surprised if he could smell it down the phone, "Why choose that, Doctor?"

"Think."

It took all of her residual strength to not fry her brain thinking about it- half of it still asleep, like a dolphin's. She gathered herself: "It can be understood backwards, but must be read forwards."

Hannibal was pleased, "Such is life."

"...You kept asking me, about what happens before he kills them."

"We must all live through past days. Understand our choices. Learn from mistakes." Hannibal mused, "Our experience is what makes us human."

"I need to see this case backwards?" She asked, "If it was abuse and trauma that started this, and he needed a buffer, do you mean a buffer to protect himself from harm? Or to hide others from him?"

"Why not both?" The wind picked up outside, to bring the storm clouds in. It rattled at the window.

"After the first you think he found it. A balance. He made a choice to confront his urges after a long time of planning." She was finally putting puzzle pieces in place, "It had to be familiar to him, since he knew what he was doing so quickly."

"What happened before he confronted himself, Clarice? What happened before he acted on his hunger?"

"He planned it thoroughly. He planned where he'd take her from, planned what he'd take from *her*."

"What made Frederica Bimmel's discovery different from the others?"

"He weighed her down so she wouldn't be found."

"Why did he not want her to be found? Why her, specifically? How was she different?"

"She was important to him. She was his first kill." She was seeing things clearly, "His buffer."

"...Clarice?"

"He had to have a initial defence... or, plan, and the rest would be made easier. Because if he killed someone important to him, the others would be deescalation. Because killing strangers isn't as bad as-- killing someone- you know--" It all made sense. She almost dropped the phone, "He knew her."

Hannibal smiled. She didn't know if she would cry in relief, or in sorrow.

Clarice hung up the phone, and ran.

Chapter End Notes

!!!!!!

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

One should forgive one's enemies, but not before they are hanged.
-Heinrich Heine

Clarice fears losing her mind, as the investigation is unexpectedly stunted. She phones the hospital, and the dominos start to fall. It all starts with Doctor Chilton.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The day passed and it felt like a week. She slaved all morning, going over reports to be sure, finding addresses, staring at crime scene photos in the semi-dark. Before anyone else was awake, she borrowed Ardelia's truck, and skipped a few towns over to find the Bimmel family, who'd temporarily settled to be closer to Quantico.

Their daughter's corpse hadn't yet been released. They didn't want to go home without her.

As they initially refused to let her in the house, it being so early, she asked questions on the doorstep, and they offhandedly told her about a high school ex-boyfriend. He'd stalked her for a few months, but nothing serious.

Nothing serious?

As promising as it was, after calling Zeller to crosscheck, it turned out that the man had moved to Iceland more than a decade prior, and hadn't come back since. Wonderful.

Persistent concern got her invited in, where they allowed her to go through yearbooks and old photo albums- letting her go on thinking that she'd know who she was looking for; she just needed to see him. She kept glancing at the clock, as if the body would drop on the hour that three days were up, and that would be it. A vile version of Cinderella. The dread hunkered low in her stomach, shifting and tightening. It was probably the only thing keeping her conscious.

Using their contact, she called the detective out in Missouri who'd first been assigned to the case before FBI involvement, and he informed her about a violent assault of a woman a week before Bimmel's disappearance. Once investigated, without any name to tie it to, Clarice found no link. Apart from that, he only regurgitated information she already had.

She made another round of phone calls to the further-off relatives and friends afterwards, only to be dismissed or shouted at down the phone- was warned to stop leaving voicemails or they'd report to her superior. One of the friends verified the stalking ex-boyfriend, but that

was about it. If Clarice had the time, she would've flown out there, spoke to people in person; sat in the diner where she once worked, all day- or maybe for a few- and waited for someone suspicious to come in and catch her eye. But otherwise, there was nothing. Nothing she could do to help.

When she became so deliriously tired she couldn't read anymore, she made it back home, and collapsed onto the couch.

As a rule, she'd only sleep for a few hours. *One nap*. Even though the case wasn't solely her responsibility, she had to try everything, even if it meant sacrificing her beauty sleep-- her sanity. There was no time to lose.

Clarice had dreams where she was floating downstream. Clouds and trees passed her, unshapely and morphed together, and she couldn't hear or feel anything, aside from cold, rushing water. She felt *breached*. Her limbs were weighted and dead, leaving her unable to move no matter how hard she tried. Her chest cavity was heavy and tight- it felt like her ribcage was being stood on, and the weight would bear down, until her bones began to splinter. Her lungs would become pin cushions. She couldn't breathe. Couldn't scream. She could only sink.

The fish chewed at her sides, and she felt it. Tasted salt. She saw herself from above with the riverbank either side, her body limply caught on a rock. There was nothing she could do. Her skin, torn and blue, was left slimy and waterlogged; her heart no longer beating inside her chest. Her once bright blue eyes were dulled and glassy, to be later pecked out by the crows.

She woke up with a gasp, screams stuck in her ears like water. Ardelia hadn't woken her, even when she'd slept through her alarms. She did need the sleep. But rain had lingered outside, so dark and imposing it may as well have been night, and Clarice panicked.

It was only three in the afternoon, but the wintery grey sky was already beginning to darken. The time she had wasted bore down on her. Her lecture had come and gone, but Ardelia said they would've sent her home at the sight of her.

She understood why when she looked in the bathroom mirror, sighing, finding herself feeling no better than before. She wasn't *in* a better place than before- without a name, it wouldn't go anywhere. If she didn't make any progress, Catherine Martin would die. She needed to do *something*.

Splashing cold water on her face only helped so much, but it was calming. She couldn't afford to lose her grip on herself now.

-Catch the serial killer.

-Save Catherine.

-Fall apart later.

She scraped what remained of herself back together, and picked up the landline, and phoned the hospital.

Once she was patched through, it rang twice, until Will's voice appeared at the end of the phone: "Hello?" In her panicked, sleepless state, just the sound of a friendly voice made her want to cry. She sighed shakily, and Will heard her, "Hello, Clarice."

It was the first time he'd said her first name. That alone made her want to weep.

"I can't find him." She said tightly, holding in her tears, "No one can find him. They can't tell me anything, like he's some kind of ghost, and she never mentioned anyone. She can't help. She only has one more day. I need her to point me in a direction, somehow-- she's got to have left something. I need to do something, anything that I haven't yet tr--"

"No, you don't."

She swallowed against the lump in her throat, offended, "But Catherine will--"

"Catherine will fight. Whether she lives or she dies is not up to you."

He frowned, "It's up to me to try to help her."

"And all you can do is try." He offered, as a comfort that let hot, angry tears run down Clarice's face. She didn't make noise, but Will knew the silence wasn't a kind one: "He made a mistake taking Catherine Martin. Like he made a mistake letting you understand him. You haven't run out of time yet, so I wouldn't get upset about it now."

Coming from him, she valued it. He made her feel like an amateur, but never less than. It helped more than she realised.

She sniffed, scowling, and closed her eyes in defiance, "What am I supposed to do?"

Will considered her, staring back at Hannibal, and made a decision: "Leave it with me." Clarice didn't want to, but she had no other options. Regardless, she wanted to thank him incessantly, "Take an aspirin for your trouble. Or a sedative. Sounds like you need it."

That actually made her crack a smile. Despite it all, Clarice trusted Will. Liked him, even.

She hung up before she accidentally told him that.

Whilst Clarice tried to catch up on sleep, as a ridiculous show of paranoia, they conducted a sweep of the cell. Or rather, Chilton did, and stood there in front of them both as they were individual strapped into straitjackets, and latched onto backboards. Will was muzzled. He watched as one of the orderlies put his rations of paper balls into a bin, and felt the urge to growl at him. He rolled his eyes over to Chilton, standing proud, when he didn't need to be there at all. He'd come to gloat.

"I have publishing rights." He announced to Hannibal, snide, "You have the right to remain silent, in not publishing anything. Not about the case, not about me, not about anything to do with Buffalo Bill. The board's ruled in my favour, this time. That means no nonsense out of you, Hannibal- unless it's a confession."

To that, Hannibal only smiled pleasantly, "Good for you, Frederick. I'm sure it's nice for something to go your way for once."

He bit back an insult, "It's an opportunity to answer the question. What is the name of your good friend Bill?" An orderly took the papers from the desk, the drawings and writing alike, and stared at the hangman game for a moment before shoving them into a black plastic bag. Hannibal looked back at the disgruntled man in front of him.

"Sadly, the answer is not in this room." He said, "Not anymore."

Chilton stepped forward, his hand on the desk holding a gold pen, his face pursed and annoyed, "You'll answer me, or by *God*, you'll never see another soul again."

He appreciated his anger, a smile on his face as he said: "How about you see if you can coax an old friend out of hiding?"

"Wh-"

"You can do what you like with me, Frederick. If circumstance permitted. You can threaten me. Torture me. But you won't get the answer you're begging for." He told him, a picture of restraint, and not because of the jacket, "I will only answer to Doctor Bloom." He said candidly, then: "After all, I expect that she now owns the hospital. Someone has to take your place."

Chilton was genuinely speechless.

"Now, now, Frederick." Hannibal coddled, "Everyone has the right to look surprised now and again, but you seem to be abusing the privilege."

He became enraged to mask his concern, "What are you talking about? You haven't spoken to Doctor Bloom. Not since you arrived back!"

"Engaging in a conversation isn't the only means of contact, Doctor Chilton. You are the one who directs my outgoing mail, are you not?"

There had been a letter that contained legal documentation. One he had been too busy to read.

"Mail that I denied the postage of."

"That you did." Hannibal conceded: "Alana, however, wasn't so discourteous."

Chilton's heart sank into his stomach, "*What have you done?*"

There was a grin present in the lines around his eyes, like a cat, who'd got the mouse:

"Normally, a person lives and learns. You, on the other hand, just live." He sniped, stretching his neck like he was posing a threat, "It's about time you started to learn, wouldn't you say? About consequences."

"*Consequences?* You're telling *me* about consequences?" He scoffed, finding it incredulous, "What for!"

Hannibal fixed him with a glare: "Using unconventional therapeutic methods as a interrogative technique? Overdosing patients on hypnotic and psychosomatic medications? Attempting a truth serum confession, without judicial approval? Tsk, tsk, Doctor Chilton. Not to mention the harassment of a federal agent, and interfering with a federal investigation that is none of your concern." He chided, sounding like a disappointed parent scolding a child, and watching the dread surface, "You were on thin ice, Frederick. And now that ice has broken under your feet."

For a passing second, he looked as if his anger would give way to tears. Hannibal smiled at him, to rub salt in the wound.

His voice was hissing, even more than usual: "Who would listen to you?"

"They don't have to listen to me. I didn't sign the documents."

Frederick noticeably paled. They had snatched the world out from under him, and Alana, someone he thought was at least on his side, had aided in that. He'd never felt betrayal before, but he couldn't say he was all that shocked. Hannibal drank it in. The tension between them was oppressive like an awful smell, so stifling it felt as if you had to cut a hole in the air to breathe. The orderlies pretended not to listen. Only Will remained serenely calm, inwardly enjoying the moment in its entirety.

"Congratulations, Frederick." Will chimed, "You're aware of the truth. Enlightenment is yours. You'd been coerced into believing a lie about yourself. How does *that* feel?"

His jaw twitched, "I don't believe you."

"You can believe the letter of termination that should be on your desk, then." Hannibal dismissed, "Sorry to be the bearer of such bad news."

"You're not sorry at all! How could you be! After everything I've--"

"You aren't invulnerable, Frederick." Will said, as if his injuries accounted for nothing, "Control is an illusion. And I thought tortoises were slow." He sighed, "Whoever told you to be yourself simply couldn't have given you worse advice."

His grip on his cane flexed, jaw working fruitlessly to defend himself. They'd worked together to end his career, and turn him out to the world, unprotected. The freedom felt like a death sentence.

He didn't know what to do. But he was stubborn: "I will--"

"If you still want my advice," Will added, ignoring him: "Violence isn't always the answer. But it can be a good one."

Think of the Dark Knight Joker scene where the hospital bombs blow up one-by-one. That's where this is going. The final button-mashing he does at the end is what will happen when you think it's over. Just warning you.

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

The dark might be dark, but at least we don't have to look at ourselves when we're standing in it.

-Craig D. Lounsborough

Alana finally comes out of hiding.

Chapter Notes

On the shorter side, but packed full of punch. Inspired by the scene between Hannibal and Senator Ruth Martin.

Not even Freddie Lounds released an article about the administrator of the BSHCI being fired. Half to do with the authorities, and half to do with not wanting there to be anymore reason to talk about Hannibal Lecter. To keep it quiet, it was settled out of court for an undisclosed amount, and his medical license was revoked for three to five years. As little as it seemed, Alana knew it would be life-ruining.

Of course, she'd never liked him. Worked with him, yes- tolerated him just fine- but it had always baffled her as to how he remained so empty, despite being full of himself. Some kind of reckoning was brewing for some time, years in fact, mostly in regard to Will. She thought the punishment was just. It wasn't what happened to him that she felt guilty about: it was *how* it happened.

He committed the acts, Hannibal had provided the rope, and she had hung him with it. She felt the shame of laying with the Devil, and yielding to his whims.

What followed was a barrage of the same message, in all forms from emails to phone calls to a strongly-worded letter, all berating her. She expected nothing less, and wanted nothing more.

When it continued for a week, she got a restraining order. Not that she particularly feared for her life- the man couldn't even look at a paper cut without getting queasy- but simply because it became a nuisance. She didn't need anymore stress.

Some part of her hoped he'd come round, and opt to see it as a blessing in disguise. He'd managed to leave Hannibal Lecter unharmed. At least, this time. Something not many people

can boast. Or, really, he was always protected- by unbreakable glass, or physical restraints, or out of apathy, purely because of his entertainment value. No longer. Without him, they'd be no one else for Hannibal to play with, and bat about like a toy for his own amusement. The same was true for them both. But, as she made her way down the corridor, Alana knew she wouldn't be as foolish as to fall for that. She hoped.

Hannibal was stood facing away from the glass, hands behind his back, imagining the Peruvian sun on his face and neck. He'd blocked out the room to be entirely encapsulated in his own mind. Grass about his knees, dressed in a shirt open at his chest, standing in the presence of mountains outlining the horizon, separating them from the rest of the world. Will was lounging in the grass beside him, in the shade of a tree; his straw hat covering his bearded face, one hand resting over his chest- his wedding ring still there. The air was crisp and open.

But the scent of the earth wasn't quite right. He opened his eyes.

"I can smell Margot's perfume on your coat."

"I'm not wearing my coat."

"I know." He turned to her then, a fond, charming smile on his face, "Hello, Alana. Love the suit."

"Hello, Hannibal."

Being in the same room together was striking. Different.

Wrong.

"Thank you for your help with Frederick. I suppose you and Jack are glad he's now out of your way. And, I must say, your deception was admirable." She didn't crease under his gaze, remaining affectless and cold. One of the guards behind her handed her a wad of papers when she gestured for it.

"I've brought an affidavit guaranteeing your new rights. You'll want to read it before I sign."

Neutralising his expression, Hannibal moved a little closer to the glass, but not to scrutinise the document. Tension lined her shoulders: "Wasting time on privileges would do a disservice to poor Catherine. Tick-tock, tick-tock." He intoned, unamused, "Not long now, is it? I think both Jack and Agent Starling have wasted enough of her time already. Wouldn't you say?"

Alana's lack of response inadvertently showed her agreement. Without a word, she took out a pen, and signed the document, held it up so he could see. He inclined his head as a grateful nod, looking her in the face the whole time, and she handed it back to the guard: "We need an address, and a physical description."

He appreciated the initiative of asking for something else, besides a name. He also found it inspiring how little emotion she was giving away. Perhaps that was a reflection of Margot's indifferent nature, or her own plagiarised version. He could hardly read her at all.

But, he could tell that she was too assured in what she was doing, so he threw a curveball.

"His name is Louis Friend. I met him once. He was referred to me ten years ago by my patient Benjamin Raspail. They were lovers. But Raspail was frightened. Apparently, Louis had murdered a transient, and done things with his skin."

A fluttering blink gave her away. It was clear she didn't trust a word of it- not allowing herself to believe he'd do anything but lie to her. He had a way in.

"We need his address, and his physical--"

"Tell me, Doctor Bloom, did you nurse Morgan yourself?"

It felt like she'd been punched in the throat: "What?"

How did he know the name of her son?

"Did you breastfeed him?"

She didn't want to give him the satisfaction of making her visibly uncomfortable, "Yes. I did."

Will gave Hannibal a sideways glance, having been watching the emotion behind Alana's eyes. She hadn't looked at him whatsoever. Either way, he knew that tone: "*Don't*--"

"Toughened your nipples, didn't it?"

Will closed his eyes, "Hannibal!"

"Take out an organ, and there is the pain of the absence. Amputate a man's leg and he can still feel it tickling." He took a step forward, inches away from the glass, his eyes rendered black, and her balance shifted back incrementally, "Tell me. When your little boy is on the slab, where will it tickle you?"

The pressure to scream pooled in her chest. She breathed hard. She couldn't let herself give that to him. *She couldn't.*

"Give me an address, and a physical description." Her stare could have set him alight. She stepped forward, and seethed, "Or I can see to it that you *never* see each other *again*."

Her eyes were wet with hatred.

He *loved* it.

"Five-foot-ten, strong build. Blue eyes and blonde hair. He'd be about thirty-five now, and he said he lived in Philadelphia, but he could've lied." He said smoothly, her outburst pacifying him like a balm. She'd let him see her. Each passing second felt like a mistake: "That's all I can remember. If I think of anything else, I'll let you know."

She looked at him for a moment- reproach and fury- righted herself, and left. Hannibal didn't say goodbye.

Will called after her as the doors closed, either a quip, or an apology: "Good to see you."

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

It is not as easy as running, and not running.

-Robin McKinley, *Deerskin*

Clarice goes for her final session with Hannibal and Will. Everything begins to shift.

Chapter Notes

Sorry I took so long to update in just very anxious to upload this because it's important and big and I hope it's good enough! Thank you for all the support it means the absolute world. Enjoy!

Clarice didn't think she would reach the third day. But, when she opened her bloodshot eyes, before her mind had completely resurfaced from her dreams, she didn't even think about the case. For a bittersweet moment, reality was lucid and kind. Until it wasn't.

Between then, and speeding to the hospital, Jack had told her the information Hannibal had gifted to Doctor Bloom. Within five minutes of hanging up the phone, she understood what it meant.

When she came into the room, Hannibal received her with one brow raised: "People will say we're in love."

Will pointedly coughed from the corner.

"*He who controls the fool's gold controls the fools.*" She snapped, seeing right through him. A glimmer of pride passed his eyes, quickly replaced with displeasure.

Louis Friend. Anagram for *Iron Sulfide*. Colloquial name: *Fool's Gold*. Despite her tiredness, she had learnt to be quick.

"Possibly the smartest analysis you've supplied to date." Hannibal countered, slipping the gold pen into his sleeve, "The profiler finally sees that which isn't obvious."

"When he's angry he likes to get bitchy." Will explained, crossing over to the desk to collect his book, meeting Hannibal's gaze as he said, "Cuts himself shaving, and nobody's safe."

Hannibal gracefully stood from his seat, matching Will's posture, "Anger appears as lust."

"Lupus presents as hives." Will retorted, closed.

But there was a fondness beneath the insult. Hannibal smiled. They should've kissed, but turned away from each other, as wolves do, with Will returning to Hannibal's cot with his novel, and Hannibal's attention returning to Clarice.

She saw the affection leave him, like a light, or a liquid.

She sat down in her foldout chair before asking plainly: "Was that your way of calling us all dumb motherfuckers, sir?"

Crude, then polite, married together in a way no one else would get away with. He relished it, "I wouldn't dare address *you* as such. But nobody can expect to dissect me with such blunt tools, Agent Starling."

Her eyes were fixed on him, "Will, how do you deal with the want to kill him?"

Will cut him a sharp look of consideration, then sighed, "Every day is a struggle."

"You already deciphered one riddle, Clarice. Was that on its own not enough for you?"

"Not without a name, Doctor. I suppose you figured that, too, sending anyone you like to sniff around in the wrong direction, just to watch them panic upon getting lost." She griped, fed up, "I thought this was an agreement. Truth in exchange for honesty?"

"The offer doesn't extend to anyone but yourself."

"So, what does it really mean?"

"The true authenticity of gold can only be tested in the under the highest temperatures of fire." He stated, "The same goes for adversity, among men. And women, of course."

"Gold can be corroded."

"As can you."

"Are you threatening me, Doctor Lecter?"

He didn't answer that: "Being the most non-reactive metal, it doesn't wither and refuses to succumb to rust. We don't have such a luxury. *I hath waste time now doth time waste me.*" He recited, looking up from his own depiction of Persephone and Hades, his eyes black as if hollow, "I think Catherine is noticing that sentiment to be more than empty words."

Clarice sighed, and slouched in her chair, "We're running out of time, Doctor, I need your help."

Will didn't look up from his reading: "What's the magic word?"

"Or else."

Two words, but point taken.

"Do you know how long it takes for an unburied body to decay, Clarice?" Hannibal inquired, out of nowhere, the unsettling nature of the question getting to her more than it usually would.

"I don't have time for your *games*, Doctor, a girl is going to die!"

"Do you think I would know from experience? If it's a rhetorical question?" He was in no rush, ignoring her impatience. The photos of the bodies were rearranged on the desk before him, like a piece of tapestry he couldn't help but admire. He only looked at her to gauge her reactions to his words. She didn't know how to respond when he looked at her and said: "Do you think Catherine Martin has had enough time to rot?"

She felt shot. She didn't have the energy to pretend to be angry or defiant, "Doctor, *please*--"

"Will you be able to recognise her, do you think? Has time made waste of her, like so many others?" He was as dangerous with words as with a weapon. Clarice felt inexplicable pain.

"You were telling me the truth before, we can't afford to stop now!"

"Would you recognise your father?" His voice was a dark, insipid snarl. He didn't blink, she didn't breathe, "Would you recognise your father, if you dug him back up and sat him down in a chair across from you, *would you still recognise his face from his skull?*"

"You know something more about him!" She yelled, shooting up from her chair: "You *knew* him. Why did you treat him?"

"There are holes in the floor of the mind, Agent Starling," Hannibal said, terrifying, "The stinking oubliettes named for forgetting; bottle-shaped cells in solid rock with the trapdoor in the top--"

"What's the pattern?"

"There is no escape from these pitfalls, is there?"

"Do you know she's dead?"

"Time doesn't heal all wounds, Clarice, you would know, wouldn't you?"

"*Listen* to me! You--"

He surged forward in a heartbeat, "You will listen now, Clarice." Silence: "When you were ten years old you were orphaned. After your father died you had nobody left to care for you. Where did you go?"

She inhaled a short breath, like her ribs were tightening, distress open on her face, "I lived with my cousins in Montana, on a ranch."

"What made you leave?"

Her voice was light and shallow. She tried desperately to keep herself from crying, "I just ran away."

"Not *just*, Clarice." Hannibal's attention was sharp on her, like the point of a knife. Suffocating.

"It was one night on the farm. I saw something I shouldn't have."

"What did you see?"

"I heard it at first. A strange noise. It was so loud it woke me, and I wanted to sleep." She stood there, frozen, "But it wouldn't stop."

"What did you do?"

"I got out of bed and crept down from the attic, out into the barn. It was early, still dark."

Hannibal was transfixed. He watched the ticks of her expression as it began to break: "What did you find?"

"It was dark, so dark I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. I heard them, louder still, crying out. They were screaming as if-- screaming as if they wanted their mothers."

"What did you see?"

"The lambs." She breathed, teary, "And they were screaming."

"They were slaughtering the spring lambs?"

She gave a shaky nod, staring at the floor, tears beginning to stream down her cheeks, "There was so much blood. You-- you could smell the metal."

"What did you do, Clarice?"

"At first, I tried to free them." She wiped her left eye, "I opened the pen and they just stood there. Confused. They didn't run."

"But you did?"

"No, I-- I snuck in. I closed my eyes and I picked up a lamb and I ran. I ran until I couldn't breathe anymore, as fast as I could."

"Where were you going?"

She looked back up at him. She'd never considered it: a physical destination. An ending in which she succeeded, in which she was safe.

"I don't know. I didn't have a plan. But he was heavy. I thought if I could just save one, but... it was so *cold*, and he was so heavy in my little arms, and I didn't know what I was doing or where I was going, but it was better than there."

Hannibal's eyes were no longer vacant, "What happened, Clarice?"

"I didn't get more than a few miles before the sheriff picked me up. The rancher was so angry he sent me to the Lutheran orphanage in Bozeman. I never saw the ranch again." She'd stopped crying, mostly, like grey clouds looming after rain, easily broken again.

"What happened to your little lamb, Clarice?"

"They killed him."

"You thought if you could save just one it would be enough. Just as you think if you can save poor Catherine, you'll be changed. But you already are changed, Clarice."

She hadn't lived. Ever since childhood, as far as she could let herself remember, she had only endured. Her inherent goodness, her drive, her strength, all seemed false to her. All her true emotions and reasoning were repressed, like illnesses in incubation: "I don't feel better."

"Difference isn't always better. You just want it all to stop, and you alone must be the one to stop it." She sustained the eye contact, hurt as visible as an open wound. His face looked like a skull, "What happened plagues your dreams, doesn't it?"

She sighed, resisting her imagination, "Yes."

"The blood on the straw. The dark. The screaming." He mirrored the slight movement of her head, "Do you want it to stop, Clarice?"

"Doctor, I--"

"You think if you can save poor Catherine you won't wake up anymore, in the dark, to the screaming of the spring lambs."

"I don't know." She whispered, the feeling that she hadn't known herself catching her by surprise. It felt like the first pain, years after the bruise. She felt unseen, finding her reflection for the first time, and she didn't know who she was: "I don't know."

"Thank you, Clarice." Hannibal said, quietly sincere, like saying a prayer, "Thank you for your honesty."

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Maybe the two different worlds we lived in weren't so different. We saw the same sunset.

-S.E. Hinton, *The Outsiders*

Clarice figures it out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Clarice's tears stained her face, stuck her eyelashes together, but she took a breath, and raised her chin up in defiance of it, "Tell me his name, Doctor."

For a second of pure clarity, she thought he would.

"Doctor Bloom," Hannibal said, finally breaking his eye contact, emotion passing through him like a current and disappearing under a mask, "So nice of you to drop by."

The lights jolted on, suddenly blinding. There she was; the door waning to signal her entrance- and Clarice's exit. Alana's gaze never left Hannibal, and the orderlies came in behind her as she stood by the door, "Okay. Let's go." The guards didn't touch her, but Clarice knew they would if she resisted the order.

She couldn't put a name to what Hannibal was feeling, or if he was going to be of any more use now that he's got what he wanted, but she was too drained to care about losing anything now. She stood firm.

"He hears screams, Clarice." He told her, quieter than before, "As we all do. Put him in this room and you'd hear his screams too."

"It's your turn to help me, Doctor--" One of the orderlies gently took her forearm and she snatched herself away, "You said you'd help me."

"I am."

"Tell me his name!"

"He's changing. Just like you are. I'm sorry I won't be there to witness your transformation."

"Then tell me now!" On Alana's nod, the orderlies took hold of her, and restrained Clarice to pull her out of the room- she refused, and spat out, "*Please!*"

Hannibal walked towards the glass as she was forced to walk out, "I wish you luck, Agent Starling. You have a plane to catch."

"Doctor Lecter!"

"Clarice." The drawer slammed across to her, "Your case file."

Struggling out of their grip, she lurched forward, and raced to the drawer, grabbing the paper just before the guards seized her again.

She thought she imagined Hannibal's hand resting gently on hers, like a scare, or a hug, or a brand- and could feel the blood on his hands staining hers, but it was only the warmth of his palm.

When she looked him in the eyes she saw him as he was: "Goodbye, Clarice." And she was heaved away, almost off her feet as her balance went, and a few of the papers fell out of the case file as it happened. Pencil scribbles and unfinished word games: "Do tell me when the lambs stop screaming," He added, looking up to her, "*Won't you?*" And she vanished round the doorway, turning to catch a final glimpse as she did.

Clarice sat in Alana's office, on a chair by the door that felt like a waiting room. Both her legs were bouncing up and down, eyes lost in thought. Alana put the phone receiver down, and looked over to her. Seeing Will in her expression, seeing someone she wanted to treat: "Jack is in Philadelphia. He's sending someone to come and get you."

She didn't hear that. She wasn't present.

Alana's brow furrowed as she wondered if Hannibal Lecter had finally broken someone. Perhaps he had managed to drive her mad- just like it was a place you can go. A separate room. Another persona. Entirely. No violence, no trick of the light. Just sweetened words and a couple of hints, and she looked *broken*.

"He mulled the impulse. He can *shape-shift*... Someone got under his skin..." Clarice's murmurs began to form coherent words the closer Alana moved towards her. She kept a safe distance. Watched her buzz and twitch and mutter.

"I should warn you that he isn't happy with you. He's asked for your immediate termination." She tried, craning her neck in a futile attempt to make eye contact: "You're off the case, Agent Starling."

Clarice brought a hand up to her face in thought, like she would cry- but she was ignoring her. All those questions fluttering around in her head like moths. All the answers hidden in the case file. How Will had refused to look at the photos. Sections of blue flesh missing. The tracing of Hannibal's finger on the curve of an incision. She remembered him asking about markings on Frederica Bimmel's skin.

They weren't injection spots.

They were sewing darts.

"You son of a bitch."

Alana wasn't given time to react as the door to her office was suddenly flung open, and Clarice was gone, sprinting down the hall. But not towards a cell.

She ran out of the safety doors, through security, through the reception area, and got enough of her senses to fumble with the keys, and make a phone call.

"He isn't in Philadelphia." She didn't give Jack time to adjust, "He wouldn't have left where Frederica Bimmel was killed. He knew her." Everything was suddenly so obvious and so scary. It was exhilarating: "Lecter gave you a red herring."

"He's told you where he is?"

"No. I figured it out." She said, sticking the keys in the ignition as the security came out of the building in search of her: "Belvedere. All his work is there. He skins them and he makes something out of them- that's why he keeps them, that's why they're the same height, same weight, they're-- they're roomy." The air was kicked right out of her. They'd been telling her what he was doing the entire time. Just little words or quips; it was all right there: "He takes the skin to wear it."

"Why there?"

She blinked, stuttered, "It's where Bimmel was. He's taken Catherine Martin there. As habit, to use her, or to try to recreate how good the first killing was. I know he has."

Jack was disbelieving, but unable to take charge of anything, let alone Clarice, not from states away, "Ohio is *picked ground*, Agent Starling-- they went over it ten months ago."

"He hunts women. There are no women hunting him except for me." She sniped, "I can go into a woman's room and know three times more *about* her than any man would." Jack didn't know what to say. For once, he couldn't argue: "If I leave now, I'll get there for midday. He's killing her this morning, or at noon, but I will find him there." He didn't say anything. He wasn't *saying anything*. She couldn't afford to wait any longer: "It's your last hope to send me. I can feel that we're close. *Please. Sir.* You need to *call* it."

The SWAT team was gearing up around him, just as they'd done before, but Clarice wasn't there to watch.

Jame Gumb's empty house loomed at his back, a coop flown, a dead end. It was over for him.

But Clarice's voice, that certainty, is something he hadn't heard in years. He heard himself. Her passion. Catherine's vitality.

She had been suspended. Impersonating a federal agent was a crime.

She could catch a serial killer before he killed again.

He had to call it.

"Go." As soon as she heard that, she flicked on the gas, a guard catching up to hit the back of her vehicle as she reversed, the brakes squealed, and she zoomed off. The relief and gratitude she felt were insurmountable, but nothing compared to her fear.

She would've hugged Jack, "Thank you, sir, thank you, I--"

"I'll call in a jet. Don't drive recklessly, Agent Starling, but I can't get you an escort at such short notice. Be *safe*." He said, hopeful but still praying.

"I will."

"Good." He sounded like her father. It struck her too suddenly to act: "I hope to God you're right about this, Clarice." One last resistant pause, left unfilled, and he hung up the phone.

She would never call him again.

Chapter End Notes

AAAAAAAAA IT'S STILL NOT OVER AAAAAA

Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

It was like watching two people, one hiding under the other's skin. And their skin was too dry, on the verge of cracking and showing the colour of the thing beneath.

-Victoria Schwab, *Viscous*

Clarice leaves, and arrives on the front of the newspapers. She doesn't come back in person, but a letter soon arrives.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the slow updates. Hope this makes it worthwhile.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next few days went by without word. No more visitors. Hannibal felt the empty space acutely, waiting for the doors to screech open with the attention of a predator awaiting a feed.

He went back over his conversations with Clarice, lost in thought with them, placing them somewhere in his mind where he could hear birdsong. Pictured the barn in his mind, meandering through it, staring at the warm blood on the straw underfoot. Smelt the hot darkness there.

What it would've been to know her beyond the confines of the cell. He would've loved to have her as a patient, or even a friend, and be able to study her easily, in a softer setting. As intriguing and enjoyable as their mental jousting and sparring was, it was tainted by the wall between them. It would've been good to see her unobstructed by glass- a real face off.

Mind you, seeing her without a face would've been just as intriguing.

The papers had her on the front pages within the day of her leaving. Big bold headlines over her paparazzi shots.

There was blood on her face and neck. The look in her eyes were abject vacancy and stillness; a deer in white, flashing headlights. There was only pain evident in her face, a crease to her brow, a crack in the otherwise hardline appearance- to later unspool in privacy, just as she had in front of Hannibal's very eyes. Her pain was vague in the photos, like a flicker of lightning barely perceived.

Will held up the tabloid to Hannibal, its headline *One Flew Over The Starling's Nest!* jumping off the page. Clarice's blue eyes did, too. To accompany it, Will said, "Buffalo Bill is dead."

Hannibal raised a brow, and smiled with his eyes: "Long live Buffalo Bill."

For some reason, Hannibal was expectant that Clarice come back just once more, as a proper goodbye. He'd be able to see how she had changed. *Been* changed.

He was surprised by the disappointment he felt when the doors opened, only for it to be mealtime, or therapy session transport, or an orderly, with another angry letter from Chilton. By accident, on only one, they'd included the return address. Hannibal smiled when he saw it. That was probably his only glimmer of excitement.

Will, on the other hand, seemed unchanged by Clarice's absence. He actually preferred the lack of visitors. Sure, he liked her, and felt that outside of the confines of a prison cell- and discounting the fact that he was a convicted cannibalistic murderer- they would've made fast friends. Kind of did. If you can call it that.

Clarice having taken the crime scene and the bodies with her, no longer leaving them to wash up in Will's mind, his awful sleep had mildly improved. Despite still waking up at least twice every night, he didn't look as tired. One night, after a slew of nightmares, he stared up at the ceiling for a long while. Alana, working late into the night to avoid going home, watched him, his form different shades of green in the night vision.

If he didn't blink for too long, he looked dead. Come to think of it, he held the fatigued, perpetually awakened look of a new corpse.

Then, in the dark of the room, after much thought, he got up, and padded over to Hannibal's cot. Without any kind of flinch or suddenness, Hannibal moved to accommodate him, and he laid down beside him. Hannibal pulled the scratchy blanket over them both. His face against the side of Hannibal's head, arm over his chest, legs locked together, Will looked at ease. More comfortable that she'd seen him in his entire time of being in the hospital- lying in bed, with a cannibal, intimately and so naturally, just as they'd done a thousand times before. She had to see it to believe it. Words and breath escaped her.

Alana's hand dithered over the alarm button. One of the stationed guards called her on the com to ask if they should take action.

She looked at them on the grainy screen, so rare and strange a sight. She sighed, and declined to give the order. She would allow it, just this once. Considered it a sort of reward.

After a week, and still no word or change or visit, from neither Clarice, nor Alana, Hannibal had moved past it. Granted, there wasn't a whole lot to occupy him, but there was no use in idly hoping. Will had told him as much, comparing him to an anxious dog.

He had said goodbye to her, and meant it to be over as soon as he did, but he found himself in waiting. A nagging, itching feeling of something being unresolved. The need to be patient. *It wasn't over yet.*

At the anticipated time in the morning when they brought in the handful of mail, the orderly only put a single letter in the drawer, and slid it across. That hadn't happened before: "Thank you, Barney." Hannibal intoned, waiting until he was away from the glass before moving over to fetch it. Will looked up from his cot.

It seemed insignificant. No markings, no seal, not the right size to be a official document of some sort. The paper wasn't expensive. It harboured no abnormal smell.

But, the only writing on the envelope, familiar and careful handwriting that he'd seen on the countless reports and note-taking, read: *Doctor Lecter*.

No first name. Personal, but impersonal, all at once. A smile marked his face.

He opened it gently, and unfolded it:

Hello,

I'm not the sort of person who writes letters, and I didn't think I would be doing so, but here we are. I thought I'd take a leaf out of your book, Doctor.

I did receive yours, thank you. If this makes it to you, I hope you're satisfied, and don't continue with your correspondence. Not that I don't appreciate the gesture. Despite believing that I got to know you- I can't be sure that I did- I can't help but be unsettled by your friendship. That's probably exactly what you want to hear. What you also probably want to hear, if you don't already know, is that I finally understood what you meant when you talked about transformation. I don't think I had until right now, sitting down to write this. You were right in saying that it's always very painful. But I'm not like you. And I refuse to turn out like the others.

Don't add me to the list of people who's lives you've ruined. I can do that all by myself, apparently.

I won't be sending another letter. Without insulting you, I truly hope never to see you again. Yet, I still feel an odd sense of gratitude towards you, that I will remain reluctant to admit.

Send my regards to Will, as I know he misses me, whether he shows it or not.

Yours sincerely,
Clarice Starling

His smile grew teeth. *Attagirl*.

When he turned it over, he found a note- hurriedly scrawled out, as if she had quickly decided last minute to include it. Hannibal read it, even more curious than before, and neatly folded it back into the envelope. If it meant what he thought it did, he couldn't tell Will.

"Clarice sends her regards."

Will blinked, putting his hands under his head, "Are you going to send our regards back?"

"She has politely asked me not to. The contact unsettles her." He placed the letter down on the desk, straightening it like a plaque, "I suppose it's tenuous time, with all the media attention."

Will just scoffed, "Since when has that stopped you?"

Hannibal smiled at him, searching, "What else is there to say?"

He considered it, glanced up at the camera, then back to Hannibal, as if sharing a thought: "You could've at least given her some kind of warning." He nodded towards the tabloids they'd complied on the desk, Clarice with them in the room again in some way: "You still could. She might need it."

Advice from a killer wasn't what she needed to hear. He meant a warning of a different kind: "Sometimes the only way to end things is with blood." Hannibal said, as if in on a joke, "You and I both know."

"Yes." Will sighed, a smile of his own creeping into his face, "Don't we just?"

Chapter End Notes

You thought this was the end? You thought it was over? Honey, you gotta big storm coming.

Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

You can be shaped, or you can be broken. There is not much in between.

-David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*

Will discovers the note on the back of the letter. Horrors are revealed, old and new.

Chapter Notes

Was that massacre that led to the arrest Will's idea? Did he plan this whole thing? But, why????? The more answers I give, the deeper the rabbit hole goes.

I'm not sure how good this is. Be careful with this one. It isn't very nice.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Since Doctor Chilton wasn't around to continue their therapy anymore, they were fed anyone in the field of psychology interested and brave enough to take them on- which was pretty much any of them. One after the other, coming in to try their luck at deciphering their minds, like some kind of game, like operation, being gentle when prying at their most vulnerable pieces, but never managing to get anything out.

Will felt like a prized, broken animal at a circus, exhibited to curious, bug-eyed faces, prodding at him between the bars to see when he'd next bite their hand off.

Hannibal, as always, was more than happy to engage, and he'd went to a session with a budding psychologist that got pushed in the door; who he'd no doubt chew up and spit back out like the rest of them. It was utterly amusing, watching Alana struggle to find the right fit in the place of Frederick. If there was one. It was becoming increasingly hard to anyone unafraid enough to be able to last in conversation, let alone therapy, without disappearing after a few tries, too sickened or spooked or simply ill-equipped. Hannibal just had to wink, or Will could jolt against his restraints, and they'd run away with their tails between their legs.

Will, alone in the cell, tried to read the morning paper. Tried, because he found himself glancing up at the letter placed neatly on the desk in front of him. He knew Hannibal had put it there knowing he'd read it, he wasn't stupid. But he wouldn't have done it if it wasn't interesting, at the most.

Twenty minutes after Hannibal had been wheeled out, he sighed, slapped down the paper, and swiped up the letter for himself, yanking it from the envelope and unfolding it.

It was strange, to hear her voice on paper. If it was addressed to Will, for some reason, he knew it would've been ruder, in a witty sense, and easily more informal. He found it funny that, despite her extensive conversations with Hannibal, she remained scared of him- *don't continue your correspondence* was just polite-talk for *kindly, fuck off*. As much as Hannibal liked Clarice, Will was still the only person that could get away with actually saying that to him. He'd done so in the past, and he was still standing. Quite brilliant, really.

She could've ended it flatly with *regards* or *from*. *Yours sincerely* was kind of her. No hard feelings. Even though, with no doubt in his mind, Will knew she felt torn by what had happened in their final session. She'd cut part of herself out- plunged the knife into her gut right in front of them, raw and bloody and deep, and left it for them to feast on- so talking about things you never have, with the last two men in existence that you should, was a kind of death for her.

In retrospect, it might've felt like a grave mistake. Like a death sentence.

Still, it was over, and he checked the page over before folding it back-- the scribbled note caught his attention. He scowled, and read it again, three times. Silence.

Then he folded it up, dropping it naked on the desk in front of him, as he heard the door screech to life.

A crack of light came in, parting the room like a carpet, footsteps trailing behind. And in walked Jack. Will sat up in his seat. Picked up a pencil to have something to do with his hands. Stared back, indifferent.

"I heard what happened with Agent Starling." Jack said, a kind but forced smile sitting on his face as a grimace, "That was good of you to help her, Will."

"I heard what happened *to* her. I doubt you did much helping." Cold, in a way Jack was familiar with, "Did you let her go to Ohio, or did she go anyway?"

Jack took a breath, schooling himself, "I let her go." Will nodded, pursing his lips.

"You really don't learn from your mistakes, do you?"

"It was closer to a tragic event, than a lone mistake."

"Keep telling yourself that." He could've been talking about anyone he'd had a hand in ruining. Myriam, Beverly, Will, Clarice- a line through each name.

But Jack stayed as inscrutable as stone, a wall: "I will."

"Tell me," Will said, getting up, "Did you decode the message we left for you, or did you just let her do it?"

Jack asserted: "You mean the mass murder, before the arrest?"

"Yes. We left a note. Did you work it out?"

"Starling did."

Will smiled a little, leaning back against the desk, "Belshazzar's Feast. Not a keen bible student, Jack?"

He stayed pleasant, and calm: "I don't have to be."

"How did she do it?"

Jack glanced away, back again, "She combined the numbers of the victims at the massacre, with the numbers each of the words could represent. Combining the figures in the house address gave us your coordinates."

It had worked perfectly, all the chess pieces in the right place. All according to plan. But it wouldn't have worked without Clarice. She was the queen on the board- the one that made the game.

Will smiled wider, proud, "The writing was on the wall."

"It seems so."

He looked down, and scratched at the wood of the pencil, "Belshazzar had blasphemed against God," He told him, meeting his eyes, "And so God sent him his hand."

"That was your hand? The murder of innocents?" Will's brow ticked up. Jack seemed exhausted by the idea, solemnly angry, "Why do it?"

Will shrugged, "Why do any of us do anything? Attention-seeking. Enjoyment. To get better numbers."

Jack sat with that, stewed, sighed deeply, reluctant to ask but asking anyway: "How many did you kill since Dolarhyde?"

Will looked down at the pencil again, testing it's sharpness, "*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*. Numbered, numbered, weighed, divided. In some versions the words aren't repeated. It sounded better with four." He noted, "But in monetary values, mene can mean sixty shekels. Tekel is one. Parsin equals half-pieces. The last word involves a wordplay, on the two peoples Belshazzar's kingdom would be divided into." He explained, answering the question with the answer of another: "Sixty, sixty, one, and two half pieces. All those numbers, and there you go." Jack's face didn't change. Will could tell he understood, and scowled: "How long did it take to understand it?"

He moved past it, shifting his folded coat from one arm to the other, "Agent Starling worked all night."

"At your command?"

"No."

"She's a fine agent, Jack. An asset to the bureau." He put the pencil down behind him, and looked him in the face to say: "That is, if you haven't ruined her."

Will folded his hands in front of him and watched the blow land, scars bleed.

"Why did you get yourselves caught?" He asked, blandly, interested but only to shift the subject.

"We really like the taste of hospital food."

Jack's glare hardened, studying him with that parentally scolding stare, nothing but bitter and angry. Will had always tested his patience in a very specific way. He knew which buttons to press. He hadn't missed that about him: "Why did you come back? After all these years?"

Will inclined his head, bemused, "What makes you think you'll get a straight answer, after all these years?"

He couldn't trust his word either way. It had come to that. There was nothing else he could do but live with it. Just as he had to live with the grief of his wife, and the murders of his colleagues, and the absence of a family.

Jack could recalled the time in Florence when he'd found Will again, both battered and bruised, and he'd had the urge to run and hug him. He had never known which side he was on, but he had trusted him wholeheartedly.

If he let it, his relationship with Will, and their history, felt like a broken bone left untreated. Like an itching scab that reminded him of the wound.

Leaving him in the hospital, despite how lucid and aware and different he was, felt like abandoning a child.

"I expected more of you, Will." He said, softer, sad.

Will stood up from the desk and stepped forward, but reigned himself in, to be gentle.

"I expected you to know better, Jack." Being made to feel disappointing is an emotion without a word. Under Jack's gaze was the only time Will was reverted back to an ashamed child, fearful of a father's rage, and he didn't know what to make of it. He decided not to dwell.

And as much as he hated how easily he could upset him, he didn't hate Jack. All the reason in the world, to the point of having a willingness to kill him, but he couldn't bring himself to hate. He'd tried and failed.

He had once considered Jack a friend, yet, an enemy. In some ways, he reminded him of his father.

"You send pet agents to ask us questions. So you aren't here to do that." Will noticed, tightness in his chest, a wave of dread or thrill, he couldn't tell: "Why are you here, Jack? Bragging rights? Duty of care? Or to clear your conscious of me?"

Jack offered him nothing, professional, his jaw set. He watched him with a look reserved for a teacher, or a father. Hot and cold. Hatred and affection. Reverence, despite himself.

He was at peace.

"I'm here to say goodbye."

In a blink, Will was alone again. Standing by the glass.

He stood there, staring at the doors, then at his own reflection. His eyes dry, but his throat tight, chest heavy, like it had been breached by water. The silence was deafening.

The doors hadn't opened. No one had walked in.

Jack wasn't there, not anymore.

After a moment, Will settled, and circled back to sit at the desk. He put his head in his hands, momentarily, considering tearing the letter, or laughing, or crying, or to be able to throw a chair at the glass, as Clarice should've done.

He hit the letter off the desk when it caught his eye again. The paper fluttered to the floor, that note staring up:

P.S. You told me the tale of the wise deer and cowardly tiger, and you claimed me to be the doe. But you were wrong. I now know who you foresaw as the jackal. I'm sorry that I couldn't save him.

Chapter End Notes

I warned you. I'm so sorry, Jack. All will make sense soon.

Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

There are three things all wise men fear: the sea in storm, a night with no moon, and the anger of a gentle man.

-Patrick Rothfuss, *The Kingkiller Chronicle*

The paper reveal how Jack died. His funeral takes place, and Alana talks to Clarice. From the conversation, she gets her only warning of what's to come. Will has had enough.

Chapter Notes

This should clear things up. Kind of.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will would soon read about it in the paper, but it wasn't headline news. He was being buried that day. They wouldn't attend the funeral.

Jack died merely days after the Buffalo Bill case was closed. When they raided the business address of Jame Gumb to find it abandoned and empty, Jack's heart sank in to his stomach. If Bill wasn't there, Starling might have been right.

He couldn't reach Clarice, and as much as he tried, she didn't answer the phone.

As soon as news was released of what had happened to her, Jack caught the next flight back to Baltimore that morning. He saw the same photos of her in the tabloids as Hannibal and Will did, the local police and firemen buzzing around her like static, her catatonic stupor, the glazed look in her eyes. He'd seen the same mute fear in Will at crime scenes; in Myriam when she shot Chilton through the glass.

To protect Clarice, he admitted to his hand in allowing her to go there alone, and took the blame thrown at her. She had always been a loose cannon- or at least, simply more independent than most agents with her experience- and despite the recklessness of the decision, she hadn't so much as been hurt, let alone killed. Still, that was a very real possibility, and the full effect of the FBI version of a real telling-off fell on Jack Crawford's shoulders. He bore the brunt of it, but the higher-ups, and the press, and the general public, seemed far more content with the hero Clarice became, than how it came to be.

Clarice dipped away and avoided the press conferences and interviews; the clusterfuck that were Will Graham's voluntary interviews and their effect on his safety in the back of her mind. She couldn't help but compare both of their well-documented media plights. Mostly made at the hands of Freddie Lounds, and once she'd published her interview with Will at the BSCHI- after a lot of legal gymnastics- she sunk her claws into Clarice. Jack read the articles, and got a tepid sense of déjà vu.

He handled the conferences, addressing the end of Buffalo Bill's horrific crimes, thanking the bravery of the local men on the scene, and the quick-thinking quick-shooting work of Agent Clarice Starling- without whom Catherine Martin would be lying dead on a riverbed somewhere. In spite of his condemnation by the FBI, Senator Ruth Martin expressed her appreciation, in handshakes and whispered gratitude to him behind conference plinths. She didn't get to thank Clarice in the flesh, but did on the news, repeatedly.

Catherine Martin herself was more focused on her experience than her saviour, and didn't say anything about her, but would undoubtedly mention her in the dozens of books she'd publish about her awful near-death trauma at the hands of the incredulous Buffalo Bill. Clarice didn't particularly care. She'd washed her hands of it, and her decision was final, especially after Jack's passing.

Following the last press meeting, halfway through the speeches and the camera flashes, Jack had caught a ride back home, after an uncomfortable pain in his chest and a bout of nausea proved to be more than a passing symptom of his stress. When the pain didn't subside, he considered calling 911. That was until his gaze fell on a photo of Bella on their wedding day.

He remembered her telling him to stop trying to follow her to the grave; how she was always the one comforting him, instead of the other way around. He recalled her, in the balmy heat of the Italian sun. He smiled to himself, a warm fond smile reserved for Bella alone, and took the photo to move it to his bedside.

He took off his suit jacket and tie, and decided to rest in his clothes.

He fell asleep, and didn't wake back up. He was found an hour or so later, when he didn't answer the phone, or his door. The autopsy ruled a heart attack.

His house now stood empty. His bed, where he once held his dying wife, left cold.

Alana had attended the funeral with Margot, their son Morgan left in the care of the nannies. The weather shed it's own tears; rain thundering down all afternoon. Everyone there was adorned in both sunglasses and umbrellas, half-blind and cold and mourning. All dressed in the guise of good god-fearing people, suits and ties and dresses shades of black. Tears could be mistaken for raindrops. Puddles splashed underfoot.

Reminding people of their own mortality really made them quiet.

Margot placed her hand over hers when the casket disappeared behind the curtains. Alana was staring flatly at the back of Clarice's head. When she turned slightly, she could see the

red wetness of her eyes, but nothing more. She didn't know what she was expecting. It was like the blood should still be on her face.

The wake was ostentatious and professional, champagne and tittering laughter, most of the conversations nothing to do with Jack at all.

Alana felt guilty that Will couldn't be there, in some way. He'd probably be somber, agitated by the loss and the amount of people there, but he'd would've been better company than most of them. She could imagine him making Clarice feel better.

Although, she couldn't find Clarice anywhere. She'd stayed just outside, smoking a cigarette, too stressed to face anyone. She mused how Jack had never seen her smoke, and if he could, he'd be angry- she always thought it would be disrespectful to his wife, dying of lung cancer and all.

Alana declined one when she offered it to her. They shared a risible silence, watched the rain together. Neither of them really knew what to say, but their shared company was a strange comfort. They were two women who knew Jack well, and, reluctantly, knew Hannibal Lecter even better.

Clarice dithered, and finally said: "Even after with being surrounded by death coming with the work, I never get to go to the funerals."

"I can't say you're missing out on much." Alana offered, half-smiling, "Unless you enjoy muted organ tones, and preschool food. And watching other people cry."

Clarice cracked a smile, "Well, when you put it like that." Then flicked the ash from her cigarette, and sighed, "Sorry about our last meeting. It wasn't under the best circumstances."

"This isn't the best either." Alana looked at her sincerely, "You don't have to apologise. With what you're dealing with, and *who* you were dealing with, I don't hold anything against you."

Clarice looked away from her, dropped her cigarette and stood on it. Watched a car splutter past. Inhaled, "Have you ever killed anyone, Doctor Bloom?"

It was a sudden question, but one Alana wasn't surprised to hear her ask. She glanced back at Margot, who was collecting bits of food to bring back to Morgan, under the watchful eye of the kind funeral director: "I've had a hand in someone's death." She admitted, pursing her lips, looking back to Clarice, "I felt guilty. After Will."

Clarice was suddenly concerned, "He's not dead?"

"No. But the man he used to be is." She sighed, "It sounds-- *reductive*. You'd know what I mean if you saw him before all this. In some ways, he's still himself. I don't think Jack recognised him, or *wanted* to, for that matter."

Clarice considered it. She felt like she knew what she meant, but she couldn't really. It must've been hard on Alana, and she doubted she got any recognition for that, "Jack spoke

about him a lot." She breathed a curt laugh, then schooled herself, "I think he liked Will more than me."

Alana almost shrugged, "You share his qualities of intelligence and empathy, but you're troubled like him. Lonely." Clarice didn't exactly disagree, lit another cigarette, "You challenged him. Jack never much liked anyone who did that."

Clarice couldn't help but feel curious: "Did he like you?"

"He respected me. Probably too much. But I have a habit of trying to get people to do the morally right thing, and, the more I know, the least I trust people to do that." She explained, lighthearted. Clarice knew what she was referring to, judging by who she now babysat all day. Her smile was fleeting, but genuine.

There was a gap in conversation, and Alana didn't move off to make niceties elsewhere. She stayed with Clarice, despite the smoke, and the cold weather. She felt like there was something more to say, and waited for a question, that came when Clarice looked down at her shoes and said: "Is it wrong to want to trust Lecter?"

Alana sighed again, not wanting to think about him at such an event, but it couldn't be helped. She didn't like how he'd gotten into her head now, "He's easy to *believe*. Not so easy to trust." She replied, and watched her expression turn vaguely worried, "Why?"

Clarice took a breath, not wanting to say anything, but something compelled her to, "He sent me a letter. A final one, after mine. It mentioned something about how starlings can *imitate the songs and calls of other birds*. They can even mimic car alarms, or someone talking, or phone ringers." She shook her head, disbelieving. Alana's brow furrowed, properly paying attention to her now, and Clarice met her eyes: "He said that it can be useful to-- *distract*, whatever threatens it's territory. Or it's survival."

Alana suddenly paled.

Will didn't expect to feel grief, and it wasn't paralytic. It was more of an empty sadness, no longer holding the comfort of Jack being out there, somewhere, alive and well and as happy as he would ever allow himself to be. He imagined what the funeral was like- how it was taking place, out there, and he couldn't so much as send a letter. It was a crude reminder of what they missed out on, being in there, shut in a box for the rest of their lives, if they couldn't help it.

Will supposed it was surprising Jack's heart hadn't failed him beforehand, not breaking for the first two agents he left mangled, but third time was the charm.

Hannibal came back from therapy, and saw the letter on the floor, and Will looked at him right in the eyes as the orderlies slowly unclipped his straitjacket.

A smile lingered in a glint to Hannibal's eyes.

Will's fist closed around the pencil on the desk.

He only had to nod, for all Hell to break loose.

Chapter End Notes

Please leave all the comments and kudos you like! I greatly appreciate them all.

Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

We are not trapped by our thoughts. What we generally do, however, is create thoughts that trap us.

-Joshua David Stone, *A Beginner's Guide to the Path of Ascension*

Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham are gone. No one knows how. No one knows where they are. Or, well, at least, one person does.

Chapter Notes

Of course I'll tell you how they broke out, but first...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Alana could hardly see the front of the hospital when she got there. SWAT vans, half a dozen local police squad cars, ambulances; blue lights still flashing in the rain, stretchers wheeling the bleeding and the body bags under the cover of umbrellas, an area being cordoned off to combat the first few reporters on the scene.

For a split second, she thought she saw Jack Crawford, stood there amongst the fray.

Most of the armed response team, body armour on and weapons drawn, were at the entrance. But they were just standing there.

She was too late. They were all too late.

Reluctantly, Margot agreed to go back to the estate to see to Morgan, and Alana went to her office, to see if she could help in any way. She held the key to the files, and could give them the security feed- much as she dreaded what it might show.

She figured, quite bizarrely, that the hospital was her safest bet. It's the last place they would come back to.

They'd made arrangements for Special Agent Starling to be kept safe, and were trying to contact the applicable authorities in order to establish any idea of a whereabouts. The trail of breadcrumbs ended in the parking lot, any blood outside quickly disappearing with the rain.

A car was missing. They needed to ascertain if they could've made it across state lines by now.

No one knew where they could be headed- probably out of the country as soon as possible, but nothing was concrete. Agents needed to go through his letters, and any notes they'd left on the desk, and take all the blood evidence- that there was far, *far* too much of- all to try to find some kind of hint.

It was as if they'd never planned on staying long, like it was all just a ruse to have a little fun. Alana felt played for a fool.

Clarice had wanted to go to the BSHCI as soon as she heard of the break. In a ridiculous sense, she felt a little bit like her friends had just gone missing. They really had gotten to her. She didn't know if she wanted to actually help them be recaptured because they deserved it, or she just wanted to excuse to possibly see them again.

She knew it was fucked up to think like that. Maybe she could've pied-pipered them back into the cell.

Yeah, right.

Instead, she was immediately taken from the funeral graveyard in an FBI transit, and practically locked up back at the BAU, like a criminal. When they told her why, that Lecter and Graham had broken free, she didn't panic- in fact, it didn't even surprise her. They weren't the types of animals that could be kept and tamed. That much was obvious.

Ardelia sat next to her and held her hand a little too tight. Clarice had reassured her, and told the officers, that Doctor Lecter wouldn't come after her, and that they should use the resources they were wasting on her to track and find them. They didn't listen.

As the minutes ticked by- folded into hours- in a way, it would've been nice for them to swing by to pick her up, save her from the boredom. She quelled a smile at the thought. The idea of missing them was ludicrous.

But what she wouldn't give, to sit on the other side of that cell, just one more time.

"Well, tell them I need it signed by tomorrow," Chilton demanded, going through the gates and pulling up on his driveway. He'd been trapped in a call with a publishing company for over an hour. Nobody else had been able to reach him because of it: "They wouldn't dare risk losing this opportunity-- there could be a legal loophole to chime in on the branding- *murder husbands* was a good name after all, courtesy of Miss Lounds..." He collected his briefcase, locked the car, hurriedly getting into the house away from the rain and the cold. He fumbled to unlock the door and moved inside, "You wouldn't even have to pay!" He could hear the TV mumbling. Perhaps he'd left it on, but that wasn't like him. Maybe he was going senile already. He huffed, his phone buzzing again to signal another text, which he dismissed as undoubtably yet another birthday wish. It was cold inside the house too. He shut the door behind him: "I'll have to call you back."

He put his phone down on the side to take off his sodden coat. Another notification. Only, it wasn't texts, it was alerts, from the security cameras around the house going off.

Something had been moving outside.

He didn't check, assuming that it was the wind knocking something down, or maybe the stupid raccoon that lurked on the porch sometimes. It was probably nothing.

Brushing his hair down, he went to the kitchen to fetch an apple. For some reason that had become a daily habit, since he needed to get some more fibre in his otherwise strict diet. Writing another book also required brainfood. Plus, *an apple a day keeps the doctor away*.

In the lounge, there was nothing awry. He chewed on a mouthful and tried to find the remote for the TV. But he didn't remember losing it that morning.

And why he'd leave it on the Gospel channel.

Then, in the middle of trying to look down the side of the couch, apple held between his teeth, he heard footsteps approaching down the hall. He looked up to see Will Graham standing there, dressed in dark blue button-up open at the throat, and black trousers instead of his jumpsuit, hands in his pockets.

The apple fell, and bounced from the couch onto the floor with a thud. Frederick actually gawked.

"Looking for this?" Will asked, holding up the TV remote sweetly, looking vaguely pleased. He could've passed out.

"How-- how are you-?"

"Hello, Frederick." He turned to find Hannibal walking in from his kitchen, dressed pretty much the same, but buttoned-up, hair slicked, serpent-like. Broader. Darker. He fiddled with his cuff, and the knife glinted in his hand, "Will you be staying for dinner?"

Chapter End Notes

Oh, also, I don't know if anyone would notice, but even the source of the quotes in the summary always have an influence on, or direct correlation to, the chapter/story. I don't know. I'm a stickler for detail.

Thank you so much for reading and leaving all the kudos and comments!! I adore them. You really do keep me going, it's wonderful.

I can't wait for next time.

Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Hide until everybody goes home.
Hide until everybody forgets about you.
Hide until everybody dies.
-Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit*

Alana watches their escape. They're finally free. And Hannibal will be sure they make the most out of it, even if Will seems to be reluctant.

Chapter Notes

Inspired by a bit in Killing Eve if you know what to look for ;:))

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Movements slow, as if suspended in water, Will stabbed a pencil into the carotid artery of one of the orderlies, and Hannibal broke free from his bindings like a beast unchained, blood spraying as stigmata. The first body dropped to the floor with muffled thuds, tinnitus ringing. Then a flurry of motion, Will taking the fallen orderly's baton to the other's knee, shattering it, snatching the mace out of her hand, spraying her in the eyes with it, watching her double over as Hannibal punched the other man in the jaw, stepped away from the backboard with an unsightly grace to take the man's head and slam it full-force against the glass when he tried to fight back.

Will placed the bloodied pencil back on the desk and looked up at the camera as all the lights in the room turned red. The door inside their cell clunked, sound coming from behind it. Hannibal stood beside it and took the mask off his face.

Guards entered, tasers in lieu of guns, and he broke the first one's elbow and turned his taser on him, the one behind firing and hitting his friend until he let go of his weapon, and Will attacked him. He managed to get a punch in, wrestling, ending up on the floor being held in a chokehold, back to chest, Will's legs holding down his thighs. Despite his scratches and desperate, struggling chokes, Will held on, spit and blood spatter on his face, as the man's spine audibly cracked as discs slipped onto nerves, fingernails and ribs splitting, and Hannibal watched as Will jerked up and the neck finally snapped. Will rolled the limp body off of him. Hannibal held his hand out, and Will took it, heaving himself up.

They held eye contact, both bathed in two different shades of red, light and fluid, breathing hard: "You've still managed to retain your element of surprise, Will. Even with me."

"Now's not the time for compliments." Will scolded, his fleeting smile, a wicked thing, eyeing him with something resembling glee: "You're *predictable*."

"I am only predictable to you. You can still manage to allude me, as you do with everyone else."

"You know why we planned this." Will half-grinned, blood dark on his hands as he pulled up his sleeves, "Surprises keep things exciting. I didn't know you liked them so much."

"I've always been enthralled by you, Will. Your mind never fails to leave me in awe, for better or for worse." Hearing the alarm blare outside the cell, Hannibal took up a taser, tested the weight of it in his hand, and stepped over a body. Distant footsteps and shouts echoed down the halls. Hannibal's eyes smiled at him, playful and dark: "Still, we all have to make sacrifices."

At this point, one of the orderlies surged up behind Hannibal. He blindly got hold of a taser, briefly, only for Will to snatch a fallen baton off the floor in response. Alana watched on the screen as he beat him to death with it, his back to the camera obscuring the view.

The exertion in the swings of his arm, the black smears of blood marring the floor all around him, his hands, his face, the blunt sound of hitting bone, giving way to flesh.

She looked away, breathed.

They were dead. *They were all dead.*

She wished she could delete the footage, and her memory of it. Like an overdeveloped film quickly turning black.

They walked out of the hospital. They took off in a car Chiyoh had placed on the outskirts of the hospital parking lot, days prior, when the news of Buffalo Bill had begun to spread. The rain and the poor security feed made it impossible to discern a license plate. It was like they were leaving a motel, or had just discharged themselves. So affectless and comfortable-uncaring. That was the scariest part about it. Their shared violence had become a kind of rite.

Will breathed a sigh, adrenaline still peeling itself from him, rainwater and dried blood making his skin itch. He reached back at a stoplight to unzip the bag in the backseat, finding folded fresh clothes, new passports, and a first aid kit inside. They wouldn't need to use it- not yet at least- considering the extent of their injuries were cuts and bruises, aching muscles. Nothing in comparison to those they'd dealt.

The car smelt new. Like leather and dust, rain now, sweat, iron. It didn't quite feel real, and that it could turn to ash if he closed his eyes too long. He fidgeted, watched and listened to the rain on the windows.

Hannibal gave him a sidelong glance, turning down a side road to divert traffic. He'd always give Will space after these sorts of things. He didn't keep an even pulse, not like Hannibal could. And it had been a while. The windscreen wipers squeaked: "I've been thinking."

Will went to lean his face on his hand, then remembered the blood, and thought otherwise, "About?"

"Our first meal."

Will smiled at that, and it shouldn't have been so fond, not after what they just did, "Of course you have. I don't know what I was expecting." He finally looked over at him- it felt like seeing him for the first time in years, and God, he was so in love. His longing was unreasonable. He was sat right there, like he had been for months now, but they were alone again. Finally alone. He considered him, expectantly curious: "What're the options?"

"A ginger and honey roasted tenderloin," Hannibal said, conversationally, "Or a grilled skirt steak."

Will frowned, not sure if he understood correctly, or he was looking too much into it: "What would you serve them with?"

Hannibal glanced at him, only for a second, and then Will knew he was being slow on the uptake of something: "With the steak: blistered snap peas and sliced grapefruit. I hadn't decided on what could accompany the tenderloin. A salad, perhaps."

"*Hm.*" Will nodded slowly, brow furrowed, "I suppose we can have both. In time. Unless we only make it out for one day."

Hannibal's amusement caught in his eyes, playing along, "Only one day apart would be torture, Will." He said, placing a hand on Will's thigh, and he took hold of it to keep it there.

He looked down at their ringless, bloodied hands, like he was looking at the wounded palms of Christ. He had missed those hands.

They'd have to relearn the kindness of touch- each other's touch. Not that it had to be kind.

"What will it be tonight, then?"

"Not what." Hannibal corrected, took his hand away, and Will hated the coldness of the absence. He gave him a look, one Will knew too well, one that looked close enough to a wink: "*Who.*"

Will took his jumpsuit off as soon as he could, dressed, and washed the blood off his face and hands in Chilton's bathroom sink. Cold water was so nice on his skin. It felt so strange to see his own reflection again.

It was less strange to see Hannibal's reflection moving up beside his. He turned his face, looked him right in the eyes, to find them inches apart. Startling intimacy. In a completely unfamiliar house. But not quite touching. Not yet.

Will's brow ticked up, expression remaining placid: "Is there something I can help you with?" He asked, a hairsbreadth away from Hannibal's lips, his shadow cutting over his face.

"There are a few things I can think of."

It sounded like a threat. Will couldn't help but smile.

"Do you have any idea," He breathed, "How insufferable you are?"

Hannibal's hand moved up to his throat, cradling the back of his neck in one motion, like a caress, and sighed softly: "I'm sure you'll tell me. If it ever becomes too much." And Will tilted his chin up and they shared a long kiss, that got deeper and deeper, almost enough to distract them both entirely. And Will leant back, quelled a grin when Hannibal followed his mouth.

"We need to move." Hannibal didn't adhere to instruction right away, strong grip on his hips, stealing another kiss, nipping at his neck, and Will pushed his face against his cheek and sighed, "Stop it," He grumbled, teasing, "Before I fall in love with you." He then pulled away, and left.

Hannibal took his jumpsuit from the floor, hung it up on the shower screen. Straightened out the products by the sink. He heard the TV switch on, and he smiled fondly to himself.

He heard the key jingle as the front door was unlocked, and left the room, moving silently between shadows.

Not long after, the apple fell to the floor.

Will turned the volume up a little on the TV. The sound of children singing hymns filled the room.

When he noticed the knife in Hannibal's hand Frederick looked like he would faint. Will skulked behind him to watch, picked the apple off the floor and took a bite, "Are you going to kill me?"

Hannibal looked at him flatly, stopping, watching him move back in a flutter, "Are you scared, Frederick?"

He almost fell backwards as he retreated behind the coffee table and confessed in a horrified breath: "Yes."

"Is it because you don't know what happens after death?"

"What?"

"You don't have any ideas?" Hannibal asked, inclining his head, moving over to him steadily. One step for every five he scuttled back, "You didn't see the light at the end of the tunnel when you were in the jaws of the great red dragon?"

Will placed the half-eaten apple on the kitchen side and helped himself to some long-awaited whiskey.

"No." He stuttered, scrambling to move out to the entryway, to the front door, but there was nothing between them anymore. He swallowed thickly: "I only saw darkness."

"Good." Hannibal conceded, levelling with him: "And *yes*. I am going to kill you." He said, studying his face like he was deciding what to do, "Then I will make a mess of your body afterwards, to make it look worse than it is."

"No, no, no. *No! Please--*"

"Don't get excited, Frederick. If you struggle, I guarantee, that it will be much, much worse," Hannibal warned, casually holding the knife in front of him, like it was simply part of his hand: "You should sit down. I'd rather do this without the fuss, wouldn't you?" He couldn't really give a coherent answer: "Unless you would prefer that?"

Frederick had lost sight of Will. He couldn't hear much apart from the sound of the choir, and the deep cadence of Hannibal's voice. His heart was a trapped bird in his chest.

He backed himself against the staircase, mere feet from the front door. He glanced at it, shaking, wanting to run. Like a rabbit spotting a opportunity to flee. Hannibal inclined his head, almost sympathetically: "You really should sit down, Frederick."

Eyes wild, he took the chance, dropped his cane, and ran, caught the door handle to twist it when something was jammed straight into his neck, the content of the needle rushing in cold through his artery in one go, the contents of his head immediately swilling. He turned around unsteadily, to see Will standing there, displeased: "Did you really think it would be *that* easy?" Frederick's sight blurred and swam, as did his balance. His panic was useless: "Maybe you'll feel better when you wake up. Or, *if*." Will said, both of them warping together in his vision, the choirboys singing.

It wasn't long before he lost consciousness.

Chapter End Notes

"what do you mean you're being murdered? that's illegal people can't do that."

What's going to happen when he wakes up? We will see. We'll also get back to Clarice. She has some issues of her own.

Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives; who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves?

-Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Pursuit of Knowledge and Understanding*

They decide what is to be done about Doctor Frederick Chilton.

Chapter Notes

I reckon this whole rollercoaster will go up to 30 chapters, so we're coming to the end (or are we?????) and it's going to be good.

Thank you for all the lovely comments, and kudos, and for all of you who are still reading! Even the ones who enjoy it quietly, and anyone who's bookmarked it privately, I know you're out there ;))

This is pretty gorey? If eye gore gets to you, I'm sorry. But we all know the show, and loved it, so I don't know why I'm warning you. Enjoy!

Chilton woke up much the same way as he had done the last time Hannibal had let himself into his house. Spare the weapons and the blood, and instead, there were the additions of constraints in the form of tape, securing his wrists and ankles to the seat. Almost the same treatment he gave them in the hospital.

He stared down at his bound hands in disbelief, wriggling against his confines, mewling mournfully. And, suddenly remembering the company he was sharing, he looked up with a stifled gasp to be met with Hannibal's eyes, who was sat across from him as he would in therapy. He was serpent-like, legs crossed over one another, staring back at him with thinly veiled amusement. The corner of his mouth ticked into a small smile.

It was then that Frederick realised that Will was behind him. He could see him in his peripherals, lurking like the shadow of a shark.

"They often warn possible victims to not let their attackers take them to a second location, due to the risk of it becoming a crime scene." Hannibal snatched his attention, inclining his head, "It is a strange realisation to come to, to know that wherever you are, no matter how

safe you believe yourself to be, could easily become the last place you are seen alive." Hannibal folded his empty hands in his lap, "Don't worry, Frederick. We don't need to take you anywhere. We are already in a perfectly suitable place to kill you."

He began to panic, sweat, poorly form some kind of persuasion. That was stopped when the edge of a blade was pressed to his throat, his hair pulled up to have it dig under his chin. Will only looked at Hannibal.

"Look at me." Hannibal levelled with Frederick, flat and affectless: "Give him one reason why he shouldn't kill you."

At that, he whimpered, struggled to find words, "Are you asking me to-- to *beg* for my *life*?" He whined, strained and wide-eyed.

"Yes."

Faced with such humiliation, his pride managed to slither back to him, a final rally, as he shakily hissed out: "I don't make bargains with the devil."

"Good. The devil is a fairytale." Hannibal conceded, meeting Will's eyes, "He's your worst nightmare, and he's standing right behind you."

With that, Chilton looked up to see Will, dead behind the eyes, and he felt the knife move to his cheek. Spit at the corners of his mouth as he blubbered a: "*Please--*" Then he had no choice but to scream, as the knife was plunged into his eye socket, blood bursting from it like a surge of water, and, with the sound of bones rubbing together and the squishing of wet meat, his milky eye was cut out of his head.

A flick of the wrist like popping a bottle top and it fell unceremoniously down his front, between his legs, onto the floor. Will let go of him and his head hung backwards, breathing hard and fast, somehow able to stay conscious. His body twitched, like a fly-ridden carcass.

Blood ran in thick rivulets down his swelling face and rubbery neck, quickly darkening the fabric of his suit. Will stood back to watch.

In between the timbre funeral of the pipe organ, sustaining notes in the air unlike voices ever could, Chilton began muttering. Breathy words, like he wasn't even aware of himself. Will's brow furrowed curiously: "What is he doing?"

Hannibal got up to stand beside him, admiring him with close attention, appreciating the blood staining his hands once again, then to Frederick: "Praying, I believe." Will passed the knife over to him, offering only a cursory glance, "Even devout atheists deign to religion, but only when there's no other hope."

"Praying for divine intervention?" Will said, eyes half-lidded when he looked at him, full of mirth, "Will I be forced to wear your armour? Or will God smite us both down?"

Hannibal passed him his half-empty glass of scotch, the blood on his fingertips marring the glass as he took it: "Will he be able to?"

"You tell me." Will watched him lean closer, his gaze as yearning and fascinated as ever. A strange effect to have on someone, still, after all these years. Captivity had made him even wilder- he could feel it: "Will we be *possessed* to kill one another? It wouldn't be the first time." He quipped, eyeing him, then looking to Chilton with something like apathy. He brought his glass to his lips, "I don't think God has a hand in what we do."

"No," Hannibal agreed, eyes on Will's throat as he swallowed, "But Doctor Chilton seems fancy himself more important than the crucified Christ." They both looked at him frankly, the curiosity of starved wolves. Frederick was rendered nonsensical, but still aware of his own fear, bright in his eye. Hannibal gave a slight smile, "We are committing a greater sin than the Romans."

Will simply looked at Frederick, who was whispering, choking at the blood from his face that was coagulating in his mouth. He moved over to him, and his remaining eye rolled forward, tearful and twitchy and red. He saw him through kalidescope vision, half-gone, fading in and out of focus. He and Hannibal became one entity, indiscernible faces: "Where is your God now, Frederick?" He was smiling a little, watching him squirm, and even with one eye he could see that he was enjoying himself, "Has he not noticed, or does he just not care?"

Chilton coughed once, pathetically, and seethed, "I don't want to die."

"Your wants have nothing to do with it," Hannibal countered, moving closer. The knife twirled in the air as he tossed it up, effortlessly catching it by its handle, "And I would remain quiet if I were you."

Will looked between them, swilled the whiskey in his glass and tossed it back. He'd missed a good drink. Other things, too.

He sighed, "The FBI will check here when they realise he could be a target. They'll probably be here within the next few hours. If they're as quick as they used to be." He considered, not entirely rushed or bothered by the idea. Hannibal nodded.

"Better to make this quick, then."

"No." Will said, voice low and steady. He stared at the bleeding man half-conscious in the chair, garbling preachings and heaving breath like something dying. He tilted his head as he made his decision: "Miss the arteries. Let him bleed."

Hannibal had no reason to argue.

The choir music swelled, and drowned out the screams.

Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Why would anyone set out to break the heart of someone he loved? Why would anyone intentionally cause that kind of pain? Why did people kill each other?

Because they enjoyed it.

-Anonymous, *Diary of an Oxygen Thief*

Jack makes things happen from beyond the grave. Clarice has been starved of sleep and overfed unwanted attention. She then gets the unwanted attention of someone she thought she'd never see again, and finds it wasn't that unwanted at all.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Clarice's coffee tasted like ash or dirt, and it had gone slightly cold on her way to the academy, but she downed it anyway. It wouldn't help her nerves, but it would help her stay awake.

Sleep had managed to escape her entirely now. They'd become sworn enemies. Any she did get, came with screaming, moth-infested nightmares that ended with a gunshot and sweat through her sheets. Sometimes she'd have sleep paralysis, seeing Hannibal, or Jack, or Bill- mostly Hannibal- standing in the corner of the room, talking to her, obscured by shadows.

The deep hum of his voice wafted to her in the dark, her eyes blinking rapidly in a bid to fall back asleep but wanting to look, limbs heavy as if she was dead or anaesthetised, struggling desperately to talk back, choking on her words, and Hannibal would move closer and shift and bleed. She'd wake up suddenly, breath short as if she'd been running away, and have to turn all the lights on, and check the locks, and avoid the mirror as she splashed her face with cold water.

She was in no fit state to be accepting an award.

As it turned out, Jack Crawford had managed to pull strings before he died, against the wishes of the higher bureaucrats and with the avid help of Senator Ruth Martin, for Clarice to be decorated as he felt she deserved. He'd done it discreetly. Apparently, his plan had worked, even from beyond the grave, and she was to be celebrated along with her colleagues in full FBI fashion, and graciously awarded for her lifesaving work. For bravery, none the less.

She didn't feel brave.

The auditorium was packed tight, over-capacity, so the staff and the media and the fanatics alike were all crowded into the seats, and burst out into the adjacent hall; there were even

people stood up at the back wall of the room. Everyone neat and prim and looking their best, as they would at church.

She'd also worn her best suit, tuxedo-like; not dissimilar to the one she'd worn to Jack's funeral mere days ago. It was a discomfort that he wasn't there to watch her, shake her hand, give a more genuine smile than he had in decades. When Clarice went up to accept her award, cameras flashed in her face blindingly. The applause erupted, even some whistles from the lab crew.

Her small, insignificant speech was written for her, to avoid a media feast. Probably for the best. She was surprised to see Freddie Lounds not too far from the front, camera in hand, only rows behind Ardelia. It was fortunate they remained unaware of each other's presence. Ardelia later mentioned the want to rip out her hair for what she'd said about her favourite FBI agent. Clarice grinned at the thought.

Honestly, she would sell the damn award if she could, and use the money to get her and Ardelia away. Run off together. Just as Hannibal and Will had done. They'd had the right idea all along.

Despite not enjoying attention, she smiled stiffly to disguise her exhaustion. She waved a hand, and only wavered once, stilling, when she thought she saw Will in the crowd, wearing a hat to hide his face, and offering a smile.

She sighed at length when it was over, only to give way to a kind of after party. It was moved to a smaller venue, a more professional setting but with cake and drink. There were men everywhere, eyeing her with distaste or flirtation and it felt one in the same. In her waking dreams Hannibal had turned to her and asked, "Do you feel eyes on you, Clarice?" It echoed from somewhere deep in the well of her mind every time she avoided someone else's gaze.

People she'd never met or seen before came up to her to congratulate her. Once or twice she heard news about the once-respected Doctor Frederick Chilton having gone missing, and chalked it up to him fleeing the country. It would've been the smart thing to do, after all. She'd contemplated the same.

She caught the eye of Doctor Bloom mid-conversation, who raised her glass towards her in toast, smiling. Clarice smiled forcibly and tipped her glass too, surprised to see her; wondering, morbidly, if this would be the last time she did.

She'd never endured so much small talk and so many handshakes in her life. Being handed champagne whenever she ran out helped some. By the time dusk had begun slinking up against the windows though, she needed something stronger. Ardelia helped more than that- holding her hand and reminding her to breathe was enough to keep her relatively sane. If an awkward question was asked- *what was it like to, y'know, take down Buffalo Bill?* or, *how did Catherine Martin look when you found her?* or, *is it true that he made a suit out of the skin?* *did you see it?*- Ardelia was there to be the buffer. She'd laugh it off, or change the subject, or outright tell them to mind their own goddamned business, and went with Clarice to the bathrooms or a smoke break when it all became too much. Without her, she'd probably have had about twelve panic attacks and punched at least four people. That's not to say she didn't come close.

Halfway through a chat with a few of her more amicable seniors, Clarice was interrupted by a woman she recognised as a receptionist, "Phone call for you, Agent Starling." She handed Ardelia her glass and excused herself, thinking it would be another customary call from the Senator, or maybe a request for yet another interview as she followed her down the far end of the room to a phone near the fire escape.

She took the receiver from where it was hanging, and said: "Special Agent Starling."

"Orion is splendid tonight, Clarice."

Her heart shot up to her throat.

"Doctor Lecter?" She asked quietly, breathless, turning away from the crowds, her pulse loud in her ears in the absence of his voice. Maybe she'd imagined it: "Doctor, is that you?"

"Congratulations on your commendations. They really are well deserved." He said, so conversationally he felt like a friend, "I'm so sorry we couldn't be there to continue the celebrations with you in person."

She turned and scanned the room, feeling watched, like she was expecting to recognise a pair of shoes between the gaps of limbs, or see a blood trail dotting the floor. Her adrenaline made her suddenly nauseous, a little woozy: "Where are you?"

"I would love to tell you, but then I'd have to kill you." Hannibal replied easily, pretending the threat was a joke: "As nice as it would be to see you again, Clarice, you don't need to worry. We've made no plans to come after you. It's not something we feel you deserve." She felt as if he was staring right at her, that smooth tone of his, charming and unnerving all at once: "Can you return that favour?"

Clarice almost scoffed, instead the laugh coming out as a startled breath, disbelieving, relieved. She schooled herself, pushed her hair back from her face. She dithered about grabbing someone and telling them, letting out a scream, making eye contact with someone and for them to just *know*. She didn't do any of that.

"You know I can't do that, sir."

"That's a shame. We would've loved to have you for dinner."

She'd been having imaginary conversations with him so often that she didn't know what to say, so she fell on: "Don't you think it's discourteous for you to know my home address, but me not to know yours? I thought we were quid pro quo, Doctor."

He really was smiling now, amusement palpable down the phone, "Not if the last time you paid us a visit is anything to go by, Agent Starling."

"I know you don't like surprises. I don't want a repeat of the last time. You might not be so lucky."

"Luck is a residue of preparation, Agent Starling. Are you prepared to chase after us, as you chased after poor Billy?"

He knew where to push. She knew to push back: "I did it once. I can do it again."

She knew the smile he'd give her, smug and charmed and full of pride. Pleased with who she'd transformed into, after going down into the darkness again, and freeing the screaming lamb of Catherine Martin. The killing was therapeutic yet traumatic- quite the paradox. Hannibal was nothing short of enthralled, "Attagirl."

She could hear muffled sounds, made out a distant thud, like a car door or something hitting the ground- music too. She sighed tightly, stared hard at the wall, "Just tell me where you are, Doctor. *Please*. The prospect of a recapture isn't likely- you brought that on yourselves- but I can help you, if you can *just--*"

"Don't mistake my courtesy call for an act of remorse, Agent Starling. I don't think it's us who are in need of your help. Least of all the kind you would be offering."

Clarice scowled, "Then who does?" He didn't give a reply to that, and she sighed again, panicking that he'd hang up, "Why come back at all? Was all this just fun and games to you? Getting inside people's heads and moving things around?"

"Why does anyone do anything, Clarice?" He answered, almost patronising. She could hear Will, momentarily, muttering something under his breath, "I would be happy to discuss the philosophies on the nature of choice with you, but something tells me even that wouldn't hold the answers you're looking for, and it would be rather a long conversation."

Something nagged at her, some hint in the way he said it, "Who do you think needs my help, Doctor? What have you done?"

There was a pause that made her think he wouldn't reply. But then he did.

"Doctor Chilton has already been subject to numerous attempts on his life. None of which have been particularly successful. We thought it was time he was put out of his misery." She heard a whimper, doglike, but seemingly human enough to startle her: "You can thank us later. Goodbye for now, Clarice." And he suddenly hung up.

Clarice dropped the phone, and it swung on its cord to smack against the wall.

Chapter End Notes

Frederick can drink a knife. Ardelia is an angel. You can decide for yourself whether she was imagining Will at the ceremony or not. (my money is on not)

Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Love is the world's infinite mutability; lies, hatred, murder even, are all knit up in it; it is the inevitable blossoming of it's opposites, a magnificent rose smelling faintly of blood.

-Tony Kushner, *The Illusion*

Clarice finds Chilton. She rethinks her time with Will and Hannibal, their motives, a possible shared future. Will and Hannibal go to Cuba, and find their dogs waiting for them. Surprised ensue.

Chapter Notes

Let's get this over with, shall we?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They found Doctor Frederick Chilton. He hadn't run. He should've.

Clarice saw the crime scene herself, heading straight there as soon as she came off the phone. She arrived before press had gathered outside, but not before he'd begun to rot.

The body had been left no more than 72 hours, but that wasn't to say it was pleasant. Tape had been wound around him, evidence markers placed, the CSIs flooding the house-brushing, collecting, photographing, sampling. When they stepped out of the way and Clarice could see Chilton, mutilated and limp, slumped back in the chair, old browned blood around him like a puddle of urine, the smell of it arresting, going straight into Clarice's throat and lodging there, she almost choked on her tongue. His putrefying guts were spilt from him, greying, mucus and blood and the odd fly buzzing about his hollowed out eye socket. He was gutted, like an animal- like a *fish*.

They'd posed him like some version of the *Lament of Christ*, ironic and cruel; killed him by dissecting him along his abdominal scar, removing his intestinal tract. He had died of blood loss. He'd survived for up to four hours until he died.

The blind eye left on the floor was the real kicker. Clarice had to go outside not long after, and throw up the liquid contents of her stomach.

The *Tattlecrime* article popped up not long after that. It seemed, as usual, Freddie Lounds had managed to get to the scene before anyone else- God knows how- with the photographs taken

of a fresher looking corpse, sparing no details.

It was suddenly too real. Caged up how they were it was easy to forget what they did. Just how seeing a caged tiger can fool you into overlooking it's nature. But they were now free again, feral.

Clarice struggled to remember her life before she'd been caught up in the web, trapped like a fly, waiting to be devoured. She knew they wouldn't come after her, but if push came to shove, the idea of mercy didn't exist in Hannibal Lecter's mind. If she got on their heels, they'd turn on her, like wild dogs, too quick for her to realise.

Maybe it wasn't worth the pursuit. Maybe she was being a coward.

She wondered if they'd come back to help her, because they knew they could help and were otherwise bored. It seemed a lot of effort to go to. Will had planned it, he'd made that clear, and maybe he wanted to stop the killings. Not that their actions weren't just as bad. Seemed hypocritical. But stranger things have happened, and Will playing both sides wouldn't exactly be unheard of; letting his cannibal commit murder as a reward, well, that would be smart. Not moral, or good, but smart.

Chilton did have it coming. She worried that they'd start picking people off like carrion- wouldn't have been shocked about the news of Doctor Bloom or Jimmy Price or Doctor DuMaurier found dead.

Last time they left her without legs, and Lord knows what they'd do if they found her again. Clarice dreaded to think.

She closed her laptop on the article, sighed heavily, scrubbed her hands over her face. Ardelia came over, handed her one of the plates, and sat down next to her. She sat back and leant her head on her shoulder, closed her eyes.

Maybe, if they changed their minds, she'd see them again. Leave her without a leg to stand on. She'd have nightmares about that for months.

Will was reunited with his dogs. Once they'd left Frederick Chilton to stew in his own juices, they'd left the country within the week, travelled by fishing boat to Cuba. The sea remained on their side- no storms, no sharks- used to their presence by now, expectant of their return. Chiyoh had bought the dogs to the safe-house already, and he heard their skittering and barks before opening the door, diving down to them when they were let free.

They were beside themselves. Wiggling bodies, soft ears back, welcoming, excited licks to Hannibal's hands and Will's face, tails thumping, a mess of fur. It shocked Will to realise how much he really had missed them, his heart feeling full and warm at the very sight of them. Finally home.

"How do you like the place, guys?" Will asked them as they moved inside, the renovated house a Spanish Colonial type, earthy tones and wood-beam ceilings and scuffed Cuban tile floors. The dog beds were placed by the cold fireplace; their claws skittered across the floors

as they followed him in a crowd, the mastiff jumping up as he took off his coat. Hannibal watched from a distance, appreciating Will's smile more than the slobbery galloping dog, and Will tickled her ear, asking them all: "What do you think?"

He looked over to Hannibal as he opened the back door, and he offered: "I was thinking that they'd make a great throw rug."

"Don't listen to him." Will told them, whistling once, and they all scarpered into the garden, palm trees around them, ocean in the distance. It was insane to think that only a couple of weeks before, they were locked up. It happened so fast it gave Will whiplash. He rubbed the back of his neck, hair dampening with sweat, and padded over to where Hannibal stood in the kitchen area, tying an apron around his waist and rolling up his sleeves. They were weary from travel, but eager to eat; the sun just beginning to set over the sea, making the blue sky slowly turn yellow and faintly pink. Will came up from behind, chest to back, hooking his chin over Hannibal's shoulder, his arms wrapped around his middle: "If you get rid of the dogs, I'll get rid of you. You know you can't go back on a promise, Hannibal."

"I haven't forgotten. But it is one of the only promises I consider regretting." Will let out a breathy chuckle at that, almost a scoff. Hannibal pulled a knife out of the block, happy to cook in his embrace, familiarly intimate. Will could've jumped onto his back, and he wouldn't pay it much mind: "If any of them hurt you, I won't be so agreeable."

"Dogs never bite me. Just humans." He said, mouth to the side of Hannibal's neck, teeth grazing. He hummed in response, quite like a purr, sorting out ingredients to make a meal, the meat they'd collected from Chilton in a portable freezer close by. Will smiled, mostly to himself, and added: "I told Freddie Lounds to find out what happened to our dogs."

Hannibal only faltered in his peeling of a garlic clove, blinked, carried on, "Do you intend her to find them?"

Will hummed lowly, letting him go to get out glasses and pour them both some of the nearest wine: "She's easy enough to bait. She's got enough determination to find the evidence- trace back from the recapture, go back to the house, find the vaccination papers, the passports. She wouldn't go to the authorities." He mused, taking up his glass, speaking before drinking: "It's *irresistible*. Like a moth to a flame."

It might be giving her more credit than she deserved, but for a woman of her resourcefulness and tenacity, it wouldn't be impossible. If anything, it was an intriguing possibility.

Hannibal wiped his hands on his apron, a spark in his eye when he looked to him, mischief and adoration. It thrilled Will to conjure that look on his face, and his skin thrummed under his gaze. Those same eyes he'd seen blackened by the smell of blood, his shirt the colour of it, indicating the hot expanse of muscles underneath, the veins in his arms and hands revealed from his rucked up sleeves.

He wanted to claw and bite and mouth at it all. Would do later, when the night came down on them like a too-warm blanket, darkness thick and shrouding, letting them rut like beasts amongst it.

Hannibal quietly watched his throat work, his ring tapping against the glass, the sunset-pink light at his back making him resplendent. His lover and his schemer, his mischievous half-God. Sometimes even he could forget his easy manipulations, the candour and grace that he wielded. He loved all those facets of him, always discovering. He turned on the oven, moved closer to him to wash his hands: "What do you plan on doing with her, once she's caught in your net?"

He held his eye contact, drinking, then putting down his glass and leaning back against the counter, easily goading, "Only time will tell."

A tilt to his head to draw attention to his neck, hands splayed either side of him, and Hannibal was there, strong hands just above his hips, and Will sighed into it. The sudden closeness made the air feel charged, like the smell of the wind before a hot tropical storm. His hand moved up to hold his neck, slid up to his cheek, and Will held his wrist there, warmth and breath and unwavering gaze, like the reunion of two dangerous creatures, coming together with low sounds and welcome touches.

Hannibal was content to stare at him, intense, committing him to memory, and a shiver buzzed under Will's skin, but didn't have that same patience of naught but looking, and grabbed Hannibal by the back of his hair, crushing their mouths together in a kiss. Will lifted himself onto the counter with a shift and sigh, knocking the freezer box against the wall loudly, and the dogs barked outside.

It was getting late, and the sun was setting, golden light cutting into the room. Birds singing, dogs barking. Will thighs were pushed wider, and he closed his eyes, threw his head back, and gasped.

To pretend that they and we are the same is a useful and convenient social convention which must sometimes be broken. We must also remember that at every meeting we are meeting a stranger.

-T.S. Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*

Chapter End Notes

It all comes full circle, huh? I hope that was a good ending, this has been such a long and wild ride I'm not quite sure anymore? There may have been things I've missed, so sorry if that's the case. Any unanswered questions are for you to answer! And I don't think I'll do a sequel but who knows, I've left that possibility open I guess.

Thank you so much for reading and leaving kudos and comments, I never expected it, and it's really kept this going. I can't thank you enough!

Yes, Will did quote Marilyn Munroe there because, why wouldn't he?

ALSO I've purposefully subtly linked this with my domesticity series that you can find [here](#), if you want to explore their life before they got recaptured.

Works inspired by this one

[Restricted Work] by [CoraWritesThings](#)

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